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THE HERIOTS

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THE HERIOTS

BY

SIR HENRY STEWART CUNNINGHAM, K.C.I.E.

AUTHOR OF

'CHRONICLES OF DUSTYFORE,' 'WHEAT AND TARES,' 'THE CŒRULEANS,' ETC.

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TO

E. C. E.

'When all is done, human life is, at the greatest and the best, but like a froward child, that must be played with and humoured a little to keep it quiet, till it falls asleep, and then the care is over.'

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CHAPTER I

AN OLD HOME

'Happy is your grace,
That can translate the stubbornness of Fortune
Into so quiet and so sweet a style.'

HUNTSHAM COURT was one of those delightful old homes which transform the dull prose of country life into an idyll dear to the Englishman's heart. It was idyllic, at any rate, to the Heriots, several generations of whom had first seen the light of day and had taken their last look at it beneath that friendly roof. To them it was a shrine of precious relics and dear associations. Its very shabbiness breathed a poetry that seemed to scorn the vulgar necessities of material repair. Its gables peeping through the elms, its weather-stained walls, its rambling passages—whose geography one almost needed to be born a Heriot to understand—its galleries stored with many a trophy of travel and endless collections of faded books, its great bedrooms, where each generation of dwellers seemed to have left some stamp of personality—picture or print, historic bed or anecdotic chair—how tight a hold do such things take on loving hearts, whose love began with the first wondering looks of infancy! Outside, the great stretches of lawn, smooth with the care of centuries—the quaint stateliness of the gardens—the wide-spreading beeches that crowned the hillsides of the park—the moss-grown paths through depths of wood—each seemed to tell its own romance—a romance none the

less charming for being often told—which made it natural for the Heriots to hold, foremost in their family creed, the loyal dogma that, for them at any rate, there was and could be no place like home.

To Sir Adrian, the present Lord of Huntsham, his estate was suggestive of thoughts other than romantic—thoughts harassing, sordid, soul-depressing. It meant fields of stiff clay where nothing but wheat could be grown, and wheat only at a loss; farms unlet or let only at a calamitous decline from their former rental; mortgages whose interest was an incessant drag, and whose capital had to be found at inconvenient moments—charges which, unluckily, did not diminish with the means of defraying them—dilapidations which it was costly to remedy and ruinous to neglect—a banker's book which too often revealed that most disagreeable of all reading, an overdrawn account. Sir Adrian was excessively embarrassed, and his struggles to escape from embarrassment—which had mostly taken the form of injudiciously speculative projects—had only sunk him deeper in distress. Such struggles involve sad wear and tear of brain, nerve and temper. Sir Adrian was oftentimes in the depths of low spirits—depths whose profundity defied the gentle ministrations of his wife, herself too oppressed by the burthen of existence to be an efficient consoler; or the ignorant light-heartedness of his son Jack, whom the experiences of Eton and Christchurch had not yet taught how rough a place the world may easily become to those who essay to travel through it without the necessary appliances for a comfortable journey.

Just now Sir Adrian had forgotten his troubles, for he was a good host, and there was a pleasant party in the house. It was the party of the year. His mother was paying them her accustomed autumn visit—an event which stirred the quiet current of Huntsham existence with a pleasurable excitement, not without its anxiety to the mistress of the house. Lady Heriot was a vigorous old lady, excessively interested in the world, and requiring above everything to be well amused. Lady Eugenia was incapable of amusing any one, least of all her mother-in-law, of whose

keen wit and outspoken criticisms she felt a somewhat paralysing dread. She protected herself by securing a sufficiency of guests to whom Lady Heriot would care to listen and to talk. Several of her husband's relatives were always to be depended upon for these occasions. Mrs. Hazelden, Sir Adrian's eldest sister—a woman, as her mother used to say, of strong sense, strong feelings, and strong language—would have thought herself dreadfully disloyal if she had failed to spend a week at the home of her girlhood during her mother's visit. She brought a considerable supply of pungent observations, some excellent stories, and a sturdy humour, to which the rough business of life and her cares as a mother of a family had but given additional zest. Valentine, a younger brother, a prosperous man of business, and his smart young wife, generally contrived to take Huntsham at the outset of a course of autumn visits, and to fit their arrival at Huntsham with Lady Heriot's. Their presence, if in some ways distasteful to Lady Eugenia, was on these occasions, she felt, the greatest possible help. They relieved her of all anxiety as to Lady Heriot's being well entertained. The old lady liked these gay people, with their shrewdness, their quickness, their knowledge of the world, their bright talk, their sensible, if not always very elevated, way of looking at things, better than those who took her more seriously, and whose respectful demeanour was a sort of covert sermon on the dignities and responsibilities of old age, and a tacit reminder of its approaching end.

'We old people,' she used to say, 'want cheering, and, above everything, not to be preached at. Some people cannot help preaching.' Sir Adrian and Lady Eugenia had sometimes—Lady Heriot was constrained to admit to herself—the effect of a dull sermon. She resented such sermons the more because Sir Adrian laboured under the disadvantage of recalling to her recollection some of the things in life which had vexed her most, some incidents of which she least wished to be reminded. Thanks to him, she had been betrayed into several colossal blunders, and thrown away many thousands of pounds

which, though legally at her disposal, she was bound, as an intelligent and capable guardian, to hand down intact to her children. She was shrewd, she had the reputation of shrewdness, and enjoyed it; but she felt that here at least she had sunk below the level of ordinary common sense, and that Sir Adrian was a sharer in the lapse, if not its instigator.

It was a relief to be able to turn from such topics to people who, like the Valentines, wore an air of prosperity and suggested only the successful side of life. Viewed in this light, Mrs. Valentine's fine dresses, whose splendour and variety it was the family custom to condemn as out of taste, became but the fitting environment of a woman who marched through life in a sort of triumphal procession, conquering its difficulties, seizing its opportunities, and drinking its cup of pleasure to the dregs.

The family party was supplemented by a few outsiders, old friends of Sir Adrian and his mother, and traditional visitors at Huntsham. Dr. Crucible, the curator of a Government museum, had always for years past begun his summer holiday at Huntsham, and enjoyed no part of it so well. It was his recognised function to keep Lady Heriot supplied with new books and fresh gossip, and to add a spice to the talk around her tea-table by acid drops of sarcasm, and apophthegms, whose burthen was, for the most part, the surpassing folly of the human race.

Another invariable guest was Hillyard, a neighbouring clergyman, an old college friend of Sir Adrian, and a devoted admirer of his mother. He had come now with his daughter Olivia, a picturesque young creature who wore the graces of 'sweet seventeen' with good effect. Her bright eyes, vivacious manner, and enthusiastic enjoyment of all things enjoyable had long ago secured her a place in Lady Heriot's regard. She was the incarnation of youth, health, and gaiety, yet not unsympathetically boisterous, as youth is apt to seem to aged nerves. The two stood at the opposite poles of life, but, despite the long interval of years, Lady Heriot found her a congenial companion, and made active advances for the young lady's goodwill. It

was one of her principles that old age should treat young people with ceremonious politeness; but to Olivia she was more than polite.

'Will you give me your arm, my dear,' she had said to her as, on the opening morning of this tale, the breakfast party broke up, and Olivia was helping her to rise from her seat, 'and come with me for my walk in the garden? And, perhaps, afterwards you will have the kindness to read me the *Times*—a luxury my old eyes forbid me to enjoy, except through the kind offices of my friends.'

Olivia blushed up with pleasure, and her kindling eyes, as they caught her father's, told how welcome the proposal was. The old lady and the young girl went off together in mutual satisfaction. This was the sort of thing that Olivia did to perfection. There was a nice combination of deference and kindness in her behaviour, which Lady Heriot found greatly to her taste.

She felt the pathos of age and its picturesqueness. She liked old people, she enjoyed ministering to them, and her grace and adroitness, her good-natured alacrity, made her a pleasant ministrant. She was now delighted to minister to Lady Heriot. The two wandered, arm in arm, down the wide terrace, and by the avenue of limes, and passed the gate of the enclosure where—surrounded by old brick walls, now crumbling and moss-grown—was all that remained of the glory of a well-kept garden. Nature, however, had taken it to her kindly keeping, and shrouded the shortcomings of art and the negligence of man with a luxurious growth.

Olivia stood gazing, her eyes bright with pleasure, and drank a long draught of the fragrant atmosphere.

'What an enchanting morning,' she cried, 'and how these gardens charm one—so still and peaceful—and these dear old-fashioned flowers, how gay they look, how delicious they smell!'

'Do you know,' said Lady Heriot, 'a nice saying of a very wise person who wrote about gardens? "The breath of flowers," he said, "is sweetest in the air, where it comes and goes, like the warbling of music."'

'How pretty!' said Olivia; 'it is a sort of music, is it

not? a harmony of pleasant sensations! Places like this garden do one good to remember, do they not?'

'I have many remembrances about it,' said her companion. 'This was my home, you know, for thirty years. That clump of beeches my dear husband and I planted when we were young people—I was a year or two older than you are now—in honour of our honeymoon; so they are old friends of mine, and nod me a kindly welcome whenever I come to see them.'

Lady Heriot stood gazing, her eyes dim with tears, and seemed lost in reverie. 'I have spent many a happy hour here,' she continued, 'many peaceful days. This was our favourite haunt. Sweet recollections, my child, grow very precious as other treasures slip from one. Young people should make a good hoard of them betimes. "The thought of our past years in me doth breed Perpetual benediction"—the best blessing that old age can have.'

Olivia was charmed. 'I shall always remember this walk with you, Lady Heriot,' she said; 'let me come with you again. It does me good. I wish to begin my store of good remembrances at once.'

So Lady Heriot and Olivia became the best of friends.

There was another person at Huntsham who was beginning to think Olivia delightful. She was a child, and Jack none the less a boy because he had been to Christchurch. No break had ever occurred to chill the pleasant familiarity of childhood. The past was dear to them in common. Recollection painted some happy scenes when, as little children, they had wandered together about the lanes in an ecstasy of surprise at the treasures which were for ever springing up around them—flowers such as no longer live in the grown-up world; long summer afternoons under the elms, the air sweet with the scent of hay; delightful marauding expeditions along odorous hedgerows ablaze with primroses; wild adventures into the interminable depths of a park plantation. So childhood's remembered joys gave to each a romantic background which threw a tender radiance on the commonplace intimacy of grown-up life.

And now a new pulse stirring in Jack's blood told him that he was a child no longer, and that his companion was enchanting.

Before many days were passed Jack began to talk about Olivia with a vehemence that aroused his mother's vague anxiety to active alarm.

'Yes,' Lady Eugenia had said with artless hypocrisy, 'I suppose she would be called a pretty girl; but she is a mere child, and you never can know how children will turn out; she is perfectly unformed.'

'Unformed, mother!' cried the enthusiastic Jack. 'What can you mean by that? How would you have her formed? How many women in England are formed half as well? Is she not like a Sir Joshua Reynolds, stepping out of its frame—a dream of grace and refinement, only with colours ten times more enchanting than any Sir Joshua!'

'How can you talk in that way, Jack?' said his mother; 'the girl is well enough, and it is fortunate that she seems to be intelligent; she will probably have to earn her living as a governess.'

'A governess!' cried Jack, his excited mood all the hotter for his mother's coolness; 'a governess! a goddess! I could tell you of plenty of scholars who would like to learn of such a governess as that! All the world will be fighting for her, you will see.'

'Fighting for her!' cried Lady Eugenia; 'that is not what generally happens when young governesses—pretty or ugly—are in want of a situation. Happily there is no need to think about it at present.'

Be Olivia's prospects what they might, there was nothing to prevent the two young people enjoying themselves meantime to their hearts' content. Jack had just passed his last Oxford examination—an effort of intellect which justified the pleasant idleness of a long vacation. Amid many abortive attempts at assiduity, he was diligent at one thing—his violin. The presence of Olivia—ready to play his accompaniments—gave a great stimulus to diligence. What pleasanter pretence at an industrious morning than

to practise duets with so opportune a companion? Nothing more promotes the flow of talk than an employment which justifies silence but admits readily of interruption. Jack and Olivia, it may be surmised, stopped frequently in their labours to exchange ideas or to indulge in a little permissible self-applause at the success of the performance.

Olivia, with her fingers resting on the notes like a modern St. Cecilia in flesh and blood—Jack kneeling on the ottoman, bow in hand, forgetful of everything but his delightful companion—how pleasantly, how swiftly such mornings slip away!

CHAPTER II

OLIVIA

'For she was faire, as faire might ever be,
And in the flower of her freshest age;
Yet full of grace and goodly modestie,
That even Heaven rejoiced her sweete face to see.'

MRS. VALENTINE HERIOT'S relations, the Goldinghams, lived at 'the Pines,' a fine place within an afternoon's drive of Huntsham. They were extremely rich. The founder of the family had realised a huge fortune from a stucco, of which he was the fortunate monopolist, and which had established its fame as by many degrees harder, more weather-tight, and more economical than any previously revealed to human ken. Mr. Goldingham, it was said, had spent half a million in advertising, had bought up big competitors and crushed the small, and now held the markets of the world. Wealth, accordingly, was as abundant at the Pines as it was conspicuous by its absence at Huntsham.

Sir Adrian had always disliked his opulent neighbours. Their splendour—comfortable and solid—contrasted disagreeably with the shabby meagreness of all around him. Mr. Goldingham's model cottages, exquisite gardens, and well-appointed homesteads, bristling with every new appliance, were a reflection on the picturesque but ruinous tenements of the Huntsham cottagers. Sir Adrian consoled himself with the reflection that farming and cottage-building of this order was the natural amusement of a millionaire, who wanted to make his wealth

conspicuous, and that such showy extravagance could never pay.

Mr. Goldingham, however, soon proved that his farms paid as well as other people's, and carried public opinion with him in protesting that it was neither humane nor economical to house one's labourers like pigs. Meanwhile he went his way rejoicing, with other and more solid grounds of satisfaction. He had carried an election, as Liberal member for the county. Sir Adrian, who, as his father before him, had represented it, and was by sentiment and tradition a Tory of the purest water, had fought angrily for his endangered seat. Mr. Goldingham had triumphed; the contest had left a great deal of bitterness behind it and a smarting sense of defeat in Sir Adrian's mind, already full enough of the material of ferment.

One good result, however, of the millionaire's settlement in the county was that Mr. Hillyard, who, as Mrs. Goldingham's first cousin, had the needy kinsman's claim upon his wealthy relations, was, through her influence, presented with the incumbency of a small Rectory which lay between the two estates. He thus became available for social purposes at Huntsham, and was a great addition to Sir Adrian's comfort in life. The one was as impecunious as the other, and each was glad of a companion in whose society money troubles might be forgotten awhile in more congenial topics. Hillyard was, admittedly, a very clever fellow, but his cleverness was not exactly of the order most calculated to advance his interests as a Churchman. Mr. Goldingham had given him the living with the idea of putting a stop to the scandals to which Hillyard's embarrassments were too often giving rise. But Hillyard had no sooner got a living than he considered himself entitled to marry; and did not improve his condition by marrying a beautiful young Irishwoman with no fortune but a pair of melting violet eyes, lips round which the Graces played, and a low deep voice, which, with its little touch of Irish brogue, sounded with a sweet pathos to her husband's inner ear long after he had heard it for the last time on earth.

Mrs. Hillyard proved the worst of all possible managers. The financial crisis at the Rectory became yearly more acute. Butchers and bakers did not find in the bride's *beaux yeux* sufficient compensation for long unsettled accounts for quartern loaves and solid legs of mutton. The life of the young couple was embittered by unskilful attempts to make an inadequate income stretch over an expenditure that, for some recondite reason or other, seemed ever on the rise. Then came a baby, the Olivia of the present story, the most bewitching little creature that it was possible to imagine, but still not tending to reduce expenses. Hillyard made bootless attempts to discover new sources of supply. He wrote spasmodic articles for magazines, which, though learned and scholar-like, did not prove to be particularly saleable. Then the brilliant idea of taking pupils suggested itself, but resulted in nothing but much fruitless expenditure.

Then, to crown their misfortunes, Mrs. Hillyard's health broke down. Nothing but a winter in Italy, change of scene, a warm climate, and rest—perfect rest of mind and body, the doctor said—could save her. Rest! Italy! Good God! Hillyard was already deep in debt to half the neighbouring tradesmen, and at a loss where to turn for a sovereign! Half frantic, he rushed off to his bankers and persuaded them to lend him £200. He sent his darling off to Mentone with Olivia for companion, and remained, eating his heart out, at the lonely Rectory, half starving himself meanwhile. Mrs. Hillyard came back to her home in the spring with death written in her haggard features, bright eyes and hectic cheek. Husband and wife read directly in each other's eyes what was going to happen. She was doomed—and before autumn the doom had fallen. Hillyard was a widower, and Olivia motherless.

Olivia was a precocious child, and her mother's death hurried her into womanhood. The true woman's natural function is that of consolation, and Olivia was a thorough woman. She had always cherished a romantic attachment to her father, and she now felt an overpowering flow of pitying love for the heart-broken, helpless man, more unable

than ever to face the rough struggle of existence. Hillyard, on his part, felt all the chivalry and tenderness of his nature stirred into active life by the charming creature who was now dependent on him for everything, and whose future was so dark. He petted her with a kind solicitude that went to Olivia's heart. She had her mother's eyes, more than her mother's beauty, and a vivacity of wit which was all her own and made her father often declare her to be the best company in the world. But Olivia had more than a lively wit; she was instinctively mistress, as her father soon discovered, of the art of fascination.

She was, he soon began to realise, devoting herself to charming him, and found the task easy and congenial. Her father, whatever else the poverty of her home denied, could give her an education as refined, as polished as the best. An education that did not include the classics was, to Hillyard's understanding, but an empty and meaningless fragment—enough, perhaps, to give a surface glitter, but leaving the soul uncultured, the taste with no adequate standard—the most interesting chapters of human history a blank.

'All the best possible things,' so ran his doctrine, 'said in the best possible manner by the best possible people, Olivia. That is what the classics mean—all the moods of human thought when men had yet room and leisure to be original: "those fortunate early risers of literature, who gathered their phrases with the dew still on them," and had their poetry ready-made for them in their vocabulary. Modern literature is but plagiarism, and the moderns are clumsy plagiarists. The cleverest, the brightest of them are content with the humble *rôle* of translators; and rightly, for beauty is eternal.'

So Olivia's education progressed. She lived happy and serene in her own happy surroundings. Of the outer world she thought nothing and knew nothing, except that, when she went on rare occasions to the neighbouring market-town, the people in the streets turned to look at her, and that most of the gentlemen who came to her father's house on business or pleasure seemed suddenly

inspired with a vivid interest in her fortunes and herself. She had never, it may be safely affirmed, formulated in her mind any definition of the characteristic qualities of man; but it is probable that, without previous definition, she was accustomed, even at this early period, to think of him as an appreciative and sympathetic animal.

In the meanwhile she wrote a set of Latin Alcaics on her father's birthday, which the admiring recipient walked about the drawing-room reciting with tears of pleasure in his eyes, and which he declared would have done credit to a sixth-form boy at Eton.

. . . . . .

Jack's excited mood and high-flown praises made his mother anxious about him. Her anxiety soon assumed an acuter phase, for Jack's feelings on the subject had become too strong to bear either repression or concealment. His mother was the natural depository of his confession.

One night Jack came into her bedroom for a chat and poured out his troubles. It at once became apparent that he was very far gone indeed.

'You must admit, mother,' he cried, 'she is a lovely creature, and clever and good. Where is there another like her?'

'There are plenty like her,' Lady Eugenia said in ineffectual protest; 'believe me, Jack, the world is full of charming girls. Happily or unhappily, they are a plentiful race, only too plentiful!'

'Come, mother,' said Jack, 'don't say that. You know it is not true. Girls like Olivia are not so common. The world would be a much prettier place if they were. Confess now that you admire her as much as I do. Did you ever have any girl here that you liked half as well?'

'She is a child, I tell you, Jack,' said his mother, 'and so are you—perfect children both. You must not think of marriage these dozen years, and when you do think of it you will have to find a girl with some money to help to keep you afloat.'

'I can never marry any one but Olivia,' Jack said

solemnly; 'show me the girl, mother, that can compare with her in beauty or wit. Anyhow, I love her. I am not ambitious. I don't want to be a greater man than my father. We all despise wealth, don't we? As for marrying into stucco or that sort of thing, like Uncle Val, I hate the idea of it. Besides, don't you see, mother, it is no use talking to me. I love the very ground she treads on.'

Then Lady Eugenia thought it necessary to tell Sir Adrian, who accepted the intelligence as but one item more in the list of life's complications. He braced himself up to the effort of speaking to Jack on the subject.

'I have something serious to say to you, Jack,' he said; 'you are behaving like a fool, sir, and bothering your mother. What is all this nonsense about you and Olivia? You have said nothing to the girl, of course?'

'Not a word, sir,' said Jack, 'except——'

'Except what?' asked his father peremptorily.

'I can't tell what I may have said to her, father. I love her, and do not always count my words. I have not offered to marry her, if that is what you mean.'

'Good heavens, Jack!' cried his father in consternation, 'I should hope not indeed. Marry her! Why, my dear fellow, you have only just taken your degree! You are a student, a schoolboy, and she is a schoolgirl, without a grain of reason in either of your silly brains, or a penny to bless yourselves with! For goodness sake do not let any such foolish notion come into your head!'

Jack showed a great deal of the family obstinacy. Lady Eugenia experienced just the same feeling of hopelessness and fatigue as was familiar to her in contests with her husband.

'I want you to understand, Jack,' his father said, resuming the attack, 'how much discomfort and trouble you may easily produce. You must see that you cannot be married for years to come. You will then have to make the match of a rational being—some woman whose position and money will help you to face the world and hold your own in it. It is no easy struggle, I can tell you. You

have no idea, my boy, how bad the times are, how unfortunate I have been, what difficulty I have in making both ends meet. The fact is they don't meet. Things have gone badly with me, Jack, cruelly badly. You must promise me not to make love to her——'

'Till when?' said Jack.

'Till I give you leave,' said his father decisively. 'Unless you give me your word of honour to that, I must send you with a tutor to Germany, or to India for a year's travelling. Will you promise?'

'I suppose I must,' said Jack.

CHAPTER III

A HORRID ORDEAL

'I know not
What counts harsh fortune casts upon my face;
But in my bosom shall she never come
To make my heart her vassal.'

SIR ADRIAN'S exercise of paternal despotism cost him all the more for the consideration that he had, as the facts stood between himself and Jack, no right to be despotic. It was Jack who was, if the truth were known, the real master of the situation. Sir Adrian had now before him something which he dreaded more than any of the inconveniences in which poverty had hitherto involved him; something which, all along, had given poverty its worst sting. For years past it had been looming in the horizon, darkening the afternoon lights of Sir Adrian's life. It was now close at hand; it must be done, and done forthwith. Sir Adrian had to confess his troubles to his son. The confession cost a dreadful effort even in anticipation. It was a new order of affliction, all the more poignant for its novelty. Sir Adrian was by this time accustomed to many phases of embarrassment—to solicitors, to creditors, to his mother's views, to his wife's, to Valentine's. He had gone through the worst that they could inflict upon him. The worst was very bad, but it was endurable: he had borne it, he could bear it again. But with Jack he had always held his head high. He had maintained a dignified reserve. Jack knew that his father was poor; he could not be at home without observing the signs of that; but he knew no

more. He had always had a handsome allowance. He had lived freely and gaily with his compeers. His college debts had been paid. Poverty which allowed of this had naturally seemed to him not unendurable. The comfortable routine of a country house is suggestive of anything rather than impending change. It is the very antipodes of revolution; yet the changes which Sir Adrian now had in his thoughts were revolutionary.

He had a confession to make, a confession that would seem to Jack like the world tumbling about his ears—the overturning of all the solid facts of life; nor was the confession all. He had to ask him to place himself in a position which was not his legal one, to assume a responsibility for family debts which were not legally binding upon him, to overthrow the safe and solid structure of protection which a family settlement rears for the future landowner before his birth, and maintains for him all his life, unless with his own hand he pulls it down. Jack had to be informed that his father's emergency demanded the cutting off of the entail. Supposing he refused? But Sir Adrian did not count on a refusal. Jack would, Sir Adrian well knew, behave like a gentleman and a good fellow in his father's hour of need, his own hour of self-sacrifice. None the less it was a dreadful disclosure, a dreadful proposal to have to make—all the more dreadful for Jack's unconsciousness of the impending disaster, and his undisguised affection for the place that was soon to pass away from him for ever.

'These are grand oaks, father,' he said one day, as the two were strolling through one of the woods that crowned the hillsides round Huntsham Park, 'are they not? I don't know where there are any finer in the county. Lord Appenthorpe's cannot compare with them.'

'Cannot they?' said his father in torture, for the oaks had long been doomed. Sir Adrian knew their cubic contents, and the sum which they would contribute to his exhausted exchequer.

'And what an ornament they are to the place!' cried the unthinking Jack. 'What is any place without them? Just

look at the Pines, with that horrid, gaudy house—as smart as paint and stucco can make it, and not a tree on the whole estate that is worth looking at. No gentleman would care to live there, would he?'

'But Mr. Goldingham is making fine plantations,' said his father, catching helplessly at a moment's delay of the crisis which he felt to be imminent; 'he has planted out half a million trees, Sincox was telling me yesterday. I envy him the job sincerely.'

'Three generations hence they will be respectable,' cried Master Jack, 'which is more than the house will ever be. It is a rich tradesman's house, father, is it not? too fine, too pretentious, too new; nothing really nice about it. Just look at Huntsham! why, even as a ruin, it would tell its own tale, that gentlefolk have lived there for three hundred years.'

'Jack,' said his father suddenly, 'I have something to say to you—bad for you to hear—cruel for me to say. You are a man now and must bear to hear it, though it breaks both our hearts and your mother's. I have been unfortunate, Jack, very unfortunate in money matters. I have done my best for you: but bad has been my best. I can do no more. I am at the end of expedients: God knows, I have tried every one that I could think of. But the times are hard and the luck has been against me. I was left with heavy mortgages, and heavy charges, too heavy for the estate. My own bad luck or bad judgment has done the rest. I am a ruined man, and you can guess what you are. I have concealed it from you as long as a ray of hope remained. It would be cruelty—cowardice and cruelty—to conceal it any longer.'

Jack stood stunned; his usually ruddy cheek was white as a sheet. His good instincts showed themselves at once. He seized his father's hand; somehow he could not speak.

'You have been a good son to me, Jack, and I know that I may count on you; we must face it together.'

'Of course we must, and will,' said Jack; 'what is it, father, that I am to do?'

Then came the stern prosaic truth, and very grim and

horrible it sounded. Jack was to join with his father in cutting off the entail. Huntsham must be sold.

'Sold!' cried Jack aghast; 'Huntsham sold! Surely that cannot be necessary. Can it legally be sold?'

'It can, and must,' said his father in desperation; 'I like the idea as little as you do, Jack, God knows. I have fought against my money troubles till the last ditch. But I can fight no more. I am swamped. There are the mortgages—a big one of your grandfather's when he fought the election. It cost him forty thousand. Then there was a big slice cut off for your Uncle Valentine, and there is your grandmother's jointure, and your aunts' annuities, and two mortgages of my own. Meanwhile rents are falling and tenants giving notice. I have three farms on my hands. They are all driving me half mad, I can tell you.'

'All right, father,' cried Jack cheerfully; 'do not fret about me. I shall do well enough. I will go and make a fortune somehow. Of course the Heriots must pay their debts, let it cost what it will. We must make my mother comfortable; must not we? That is the great thing.'

'You are a good fellow, Jack,' said his father, taking his hand; 'a good son—an honourable man. You will be happier, all your life, when you remember how you have behaved to-day. Here comes your mother. Don't let us talk about it before her.'

Then Lady Eugenia came up and took Sir Adrian's arm. Jack saw that which the careless eyes of youth had failed to see before—what a careworn and sorrow-stricken couple his parents had begun to look. His courage rose manfully to the task which life was setting him. His task was to guard these two gentle natures from the rough blows of the world—to protect, support, console them. He would do it. Dear, kind, simple, generous hearts! Who could deserve it more?

He took his mother's hand kindly, and held it as they strolled along beneath the trees.

Somehow Lady Eugenia felt as if the work of protection had there and then begun.

CHAPTER IV

DEEPER AND DEEPER STILL

> 'How goes the world that I am thus encountered
> With clamorous demands of date-broke bonds,
> And the detention of long-since-due debts
> Against my honour?'

SIR ADRIAN'S heroic remedy had been invoked none too soon. Matters were going very badly at Huntsham. The long lane of adversity showed no symptom of turning, but grew ever deeper and more miry. The chariot wheels which bore the fortunes of the Heriots began to move heavily, and threatened to come to a standstill. Jack's generous surrender of his rights brought no immediate relief, for no purchaser for Huntsham, except on absolutely disastrous terms, could be found. It was like his luck, Sir Adrian felt, that the moment at which he wished and was able to sell should be precisely that at which the chances of a reasonably profitable sale were hopelessly remote. Mr. Graves, the family solicitor, who was doing his utmost to find a purchaser, wrote in terms of discouragement. Country estates were, he said, a drug in the market. Too many proprietors were in the same predicament as Sir Adrian, and ready, like him, to submit to almost any sacrifice to obtain present relief.

Meanwhile bills poured in upon Sir Adrian in ever swelling volume; rents and revenues trickled in dwindling rivulets or ceased to flow. Everybody, it seemed to him, who had anything to pay, abounded in unanswerable apologies for being behindhand, or plausible grounds for

claiming abatement. One farm after another was surrendered, each in its turn swelling the total of Sir Adrian's deficit. One of his mortgages had to be renewed, and Mr. Graves wrote that land was not thought as good security as it once was, and that a successor to the outgoing mortgagee was hard to find. At Huntsham itself the absence of ready money was becoming daily more apparent in dilapidated buildings, ill-tilled fields, and a general air of ruin. Things could not, it was certain, go on much longer as they were. Sir Adrian recognised that the hour of doom—the inevitable crash—must shortly come.

Before many weeks had passed the hour did come with a vengeance. One of Sir Adrian's borrowings from the local Bank at Huntsford had been allowed to run on for years, till the necessity of repayment had faded from Sir Adrian's mind. All had gone on quietly and pleasantly. The interest was carried half-yearly to the debit of Sir Adrian's account. The Bank had no reason to complain. But the Board, through some recondite influence, had of late become uneasy, and the Manager now wrote to say that the debt must be discharged at once. Sir Adrian had written back—in a form which was, unfortunately, too familiar to him—to say that immediate payment was utterly impossible, but that he was making arrangements, and would, at the earliest possible date, provide for the liability. No answer had come, and Sir Adrian had fondly hoped that the holder was appeased. In the next few weeks this agreeable delusion was rudely swept away by lawyers' letters, notices, summons,—proceedings which only made Sir Adrian more obstinate than before in refusing to give this importunate and impertinent creditor an advantage over the rest; and then, almost before Sir Adrian had realised the gravity of the occasion, the news arrived that the case had been taken into Court and judgment had been recovered. Still Sir Adrian stood firm. What was to happen next?

Two dingy individuals, of a Jewish aspect, called one morning at Huntsham and asked to see Sir Adrian on business. Morrison, the butler, who had grown white-

headed in Sir Adrian's employ and his father's, interviewed the visitors, and did not like their looks at all. What sort of business was it, he asked, on which they had come? That was a question which the two visitors preferred to answer only to Sir Adrian. Thereupon Morrison instructed a footman to keep a sharp look-out on the intruders' proceedings, while he went to inform his master. The visitors sent in a note which speedily gained them admission to Sir Adrian's study; and there their awful mission was revealed. Not only had judgment been recovered, but a writ of execution had issued, under which the myrmidons of the law had laid a grisly hand on Huntsham and its contents.

They had no wish to be disagreeable, they had no desire to obtrude; but remain they must. They were in possession. It was Sir Adrian and Lady Eugenia who were the intruders.

Then Morrison was summoned to his master's presence and entrusted with the secret, and with the task of arranging matters so as to conceal the disaster from the outer world. The pair of Jewish gentlemen were spirited away, to be decently concealed from view and provided with the means of solid enjoyment in the back regions. They seemed entirely accustomed to Sir Adrian's explanation that there had been a mistake and that all would be speedily set right. Meanwhile they were masters of the position.

To crown the disaster several of the Huntsham tradespeople, catching a rumour of the Bank's proceedings, made rude and peremptory demands; and when these were disregarded, carried their cases into the County Court, and having obtained decrees, sent their representatives to join those of the Bank already quartered at Huntsham.

Sir Adrian sat alone in his study. Ruin, too close to be any longer trifled with, stared him in the face. The evil was not greater than he had known it, all along, to be; but it was closer to him. The hour for temporising had passed. He wrote off in desperation to Mr. Graves, to his mother, to Valentine. It was unfortunate for Sir Adrian that his application to Lady Heriot was especially ill-timed. She was feeling ill, disinclined and unfit for business. She was pinched for money. A call from one of Adrian's companies

had swept off her spare cash: her usually handsome balance at her banker's had sunk below the point which Lady Heriot thought safe or respectable. She wrote off to Mr. Graves, who had already got Sir Adrian's letter, and who came to her on the instant, looking, as indeed Lady Heriot felt, as if something dreadful had occurred.

'This is a bad business,' he said; 'it must be stopped at once.'

'It is all very well to say it must be stopped,' Lady Heriot said, by this time thoroughly upset by vexation and alarm, 'but what am I to do? I am really most unfortunate.'

'I see no difficulty, so far,' said Mr. Graves; 'deplorable as the matter is as showing Sir Adrian's capacity for mismanagement, and the straits to which it has reduced him. But the sum is inconsiderable—£1200, I believe.'

'But it is not at all inconsiderable to me, Mr. Graves,' Lady Heriot said with asperity; 'you don't know how Sir Adrian has bled me—bled me. I am impoverished.'

'He has been very unfortunate,' observed the lawyer.

'And very blundering,' said Lady Heriot.

'But his blunders,' pleaded Mr. Graves, 'would not have mattered if it had not been for his misfortunes, and his misfortunes would have swamped him, blunders or no.'

'Well,' said Lady Heriot, 'there is no use in our discussing that. Blunders or misfortunes, Adrian is once again down on his back in the mud, and I suppose I must pay for him.'

'I think so,' said Mr. Graves, 'and the sooner the better. Mortimers, I see, are the plaintiff's attorneys. I had better send and tell them that the matter will be settled, and that the bailiff's people may be withdrawn.'

'And how am I to do it?' said Lady Heriot.

'You have not enough then at your banker's, Lady Heriot?' asked Mr. Graves.

'No,' said Lady Heriot, 'certainly not. I am much too poor to keep such a balance.'

'Then,' said Mr. Graves, 'we must realise some of your securities—some of those that you can deal with. After all, it is only giving it to Sir Adrian now instead of hereafter.'

'I am beginning to doubt,' said Lady Heriot, sinking from one depth of despondency to another, 'whether I ought to give it to him at all. The whole affair is deplorable—deplorable and disgraceful. You must write to Sir Adrian, Mr. Graves; I cannot, and will not. Tell him I am very much inconvenienced and very much displeased.'

'Let me suggest,' said Graves, 'if I am not venturing too far, Lady Heriot, that you should write to him yourself. Sir Adrian is a sensitive man. He is suffering, no doubt. He will be dreadfully hurt at your reply coming through me.'

'I shall only make matters worse,' said the other, 'by writing angrily, as I know I should; and I really have not strength to write at all. Mr. Graves, you must arrange it, and send me the papers to sign. Another trouble of this sort would kill me.'

Mr. Graves went away with a heavy heart and a new foreboding. He was devoted to the Heriots. He cared sincerely for Sir Adrian. He had known him since he was a boy. He knew his troubles and his fruitless efforts to escape them. He had often helped in the escape. He had drawn Lady Heriot's will. For years past he had thought of it as the natural means by which Sir Adrian's crippled fortunes would, one day, be restored. The capital, of which she had the life interest, with a right of apportionment amongst her children, would suffice to set Adrian free from his creditors. Supposing that now—at the last—anything should intervene to hinder that much-to-be-desired restoration! Mr. Graves was a calm person, by temperament, by habit; but he could not think of this contingency with calmness. It would be the subversion of the rightful order of events, which it is the function of family solicitors to preserve, to bring about. The world, however, was, Mr. Graves's experience told him, a place where, despite all efforts to prevent them, such subversions not unfrequently occurred.

CHAPTER V

'ICH HABE MEINE JUGEND VERLOREN'

'As the most forward bud
Is eaten by the canker ere it blow;
E'en so by love the young and tender wit
Is turned to folly; blasting in the bud,
Losing his wisdom, even in the prime,
And all the fair effects of future hopes.'

OLIVIA returned to her home an altered being. A new conviction had been borne in upon her—that life abounds in enchanting possibilities. This conviction was a disturbing one. It jarred on the thoughtless, effortless bliss of childhood, and, jarring, it destroyed it. Olivia's horizon was suddenly enlarged. The childish cares, interests, and joys which, till now, had rounded her little life, were suddenly pushed aside by a superior force. Till now the surroundings of existence had been amply sufficient for her. Poor as they were, and serious as was the insistance with which occasionally poverty knocked at their door, her father and she lived a life which till now had satisfied her every aspiration. When Hillyard could forget his loss for a while he was as light-hearted as a schoolboy. When a melancholy mood beset him he was gentle, considerate, watchful against obtruding his sorrow on a companion whom youth rendered more buoyant than himself under the stroke of bereavement. When he was in the scholar's mood, he poured out a medley of learned gossip—favourite flowers of study culled for Olivia's express benefit—trifles, which told her, however, how much that was not trifling there was behind, in the well-furnished treasure house of her father's brain.

'We must be philosophers, Olivia,' he would say, 'since experience, in the shape of unpaid Christmas bills, insists on teaching us philosophy. This leg of mutton, with whose diminishing outlines we have grown so familiar, even as they vanished, has, after all, given us several excellent repasts. Were it only paid for, I would wish for nothing better. This lettuce, fresh culled by my Olivia's hand, how crisp and dewy! These pickles—we are unfortunately but too near the bottom of the bottle—how rare a condiment! "Plain living and high thinking"—the healthiest regimen for mortals!

"Peace and Quiet,
Spare Fast that oft with gods doth diet."

A one-o'clock repast leaves the brain admirably clear for an intellectual banquet in the evening. Whom the gods love dine early, Olivia, as some philosopher has observed. A banquet of bread and butter (in limited amounts) purges the intellect of its earthly grossness, sets the soul loose to soar, unimpeded, into the empyrean. We dine here in the midst of our books, surrounded by the great and good—the wise, the witty, the profound; our fare is humble but our guests are illustrious. Meanwhile my Olivia grows a young nymph on humble fare, like Daniel on the pulse—

"Herbs and other country messes,
Which the neat-handed Phillis dresses."

Phillis, by the way, is rudely importunate for her last quarter's wages. Base mercenary girl!'

So Olivia and her father had scrambled through life in a not unenjoyable fashion.

Every commonplace incident caught a gleam of poetry from their romantic relations, and the grace which each brought to the humble duties of existence. Olivia was perfectly content.

And now this pleasant peaceful epoch had closed. Olivia had left childhood and childhood's happiness behind her. She realised now—what had never occurred to her

before—that life meant something more than happy companionship with her father and the filial duties which she rendered to him; something profounder, more soul-stirring, more satisfying. The occupations which she had formerly found so interesting, so engrossing, were no longer enough. There was a something at work in her which she could not reckon with, could not analyse, could not dominate. She tried, and tried in vain to believe that she did not miss her companion. She set herself heroically to make the best of such materials of cheerfulness as existence still afforded. But she was conscious of a restlessness that would not be allayed, a want which not all her father's tenderness could satisfy, a void which not all her studies would suffice to fill. She would indignantly have repudiated the suggestion that she was unhappy. Nor was she; but her happiness was not of the calm unconscious order which had reigned in her soul before her last experiences at Huntsham. That too agreeable companionship had struck a new fever into her blood. Her childhood had ended. She was a woman.

Thus Olivia was beginning to look about her as a young bird peeps at the world over the edges of its nest. The prospect was not quite reassuring. Many things filled her with apprehension. It was tacitly agreed between father and daughter that money matters should be mentioned as seldom as possible, and discussed only up to the point at which discussion was compatible with cheerfulness. Poor people, who wish for any comfort in life, are driven to such expedients. But the relief is temporary. Olivia became increasingly conscious that you do not dispose of the troubles of life by ignoring them. She could not blind herself to the fact that her father's slender income, such as it was, alone stood between them and penury, and that this protection must at no distant day come to an end. Her kinsfolk were few, and not to be relied on for substantial help. The Goldinghams considered that all claims had been satisfied by the gift of the living, and discouraged an intimacy suggestive of inconvenient demands. Nor was Hillyard in the least disposed for intimacy. 'Dives equum,' he had said with some scorn to Olivia, as one of the smart

Goldingham carriages was wafting them to the station on the return from their last visit—'dives pictai vestis et auri —but Dives is a vulgar fellow, Olivia, and Mrs. Dives, she is a vulgar fellow too, and a dull one; and on the whole I am not sorry that that is over.'

'Nor am I, father,' said Olivia, taking his hand fondly, 'there is no place like home, especially no place like *my* home. I dislike stucco particularly.'

Nor were Olivia's humbler relations more congenial. There was a certain Dr. Meredith, her mother's brother, who was practising as a physician, with not too much success, in a provincial town. He came at rare intervals to see her father and herself, a dull, harassed man, weary with an up-hill professional trudge, and a troop of children whose education was a never-ending struggle against opposing forces. Olivia had always reflected with a pang that these people were her nearest relations. She had a dreadful remembrance of a visit which she and her father had once paid to them at Axborough—the grimy city with its hideous chimneys shrouded in a sulphurous pall of smoke —the crowded streets, the rough, bustling crowd, the vulgar shops, the business-like gravity of her uncle's house and its inmates; the ill-kept, unlovely children who assembled with distracting punctuality at meal times and were constantly surprising one by their inconvenient numbers. The scene had filled Olivia's soul with horror. She was soon longing to get back to her quiet, picturesque home, where trees and flowers and sweet sylvan vistas gave to life, however humble, a poetry of its own. As they travelled back her father told her of overtures on her uncle's part with a view to securing her services for her cousins' education. They had both put away the idea as a horrid suggestion, which it was a comfort to know did not come within the range of possibility. It had remained in Olivia's thoughts, however, as a specimen of the sort of things which might hereafter present themselves for endurance. She had often reminded herself that she might some day have to become a governess or a companion. That thought had at one time possessed no terrors for her. Why should

she not, as well as any of the thousand other girls who have a livelihood to earn? She was well equipped, and the world is full of happy chances. Adventure into the unknown has always something pleasant to the courageous soul. But now, as it drew near and ceased to be vague, this possibility looked less attractive. It seemed to Olivia sometimes to be drawing very near indeed. Her father's health was certainly not as strong as she remembered it. He was growing an old man, and his old age was not robust. He was always cheerful, but it was not the cheerfulness of a sound physique. Olivia began to understand that some of his failings—his irresolution, for instance, his infirmity of purpose, his delays, his forgetfulness—might be owing to bodily weakness against which he struggled in vain. This idea filled her with a tender pity; but then pity is not an exhilarating sentiment. So everything that Olivia thought about just now began to take a sombre hue. The world was, she was beginning to feel, a very sad place.

At the bottom of her thoughts lay a spring of sadness, —silent, secret, but none the less active—like some busy little fount, which goes welling and streaming on busily through the still night, saturating all the place around. There was, Olivia knew, a tender spot in her heart, which shrank from touching even by herself. There was a dear friend, who was different from other friends, the very thought of whom set her heart beating. Yet it was a sad sort of sentiment, a ghost of friendship, for he had passed away. She and Jack Heriot were friends, fast friends, but they could never, Olivia well understood, be anything more. He must go out into the world to seek his fortune, as poor as any young fortune-hunter could be, and with no prospect but poverty. He had cut off the entail to save his father's honour, but in doing so he had doomed himself to poverty, had abandoned the chance of happiness in life. He was now, thanks to his own generous act, extremely poor. Some men go forth with nothing in their pockets, and soon find the way to wealth. But Jack! No, Olivia felt that it was in vain to hope. He might force his way to glory, but to riches; never! It would be enough for him

to do to keep afloat in the great bustling turgid stream. He could never marry—never at least till after a lapse of years and a string of vicissitudes, which, at Olivia's time of life, seem absolutely interminable. He had accepted his fate and was gone. Olivia too had accepted hers. Lady Eugenia, with all her kindness, had conveyed sundry skilful but emphatic hints that her welcome at Huntsham depended on a tacit understanding, and would cease at once if ever that tacit understanding were infringed, or even imperilled. There must be no nonsense between her and Jack. It was playing with fire. They never could marry; such a marriage would mean disaster to them both; it was wiser not to haunt the pleasant paths by which marriage is approached. The human heart turns sadly from visions of possible delight. It was but a day-dream, but the surrender, even of a day-dream, costs a pang. Olivia, like Jack, was conscious of a sort of martyrdom; she was the victim of cruel circumstances; she was hedged in by stern necessity. Life indeed had much for her; she was happy as she was; but there was a more delightful form of happiness, which hovered in the background, merely as a regret. There was a region of fancy — a pleasant region — from which stern fate commanded her to turn away. Olivia's saddened mood infected her father. He found her more touching, more tender, more charming than ever. The subtle infusion of melancholy added a new pathos to her devotion, to the gaiety under which devotion hid itself. Still Hillyard grew uneasy, and it was a great relief when one day a letter arrived from Lady Heriot, inviting Olivia to come and pay her a visit in London. 'It is a most selfish request,' Lady Heriot wrote, 'for you know, my dear, what an invalid I am, and how little fit a companion for so bright and young a creature as yourself. I must tell you the truth—I am in a fit of low spirits. I have been in more pain than usual, and that by itself is no small tax on one's equanimity, and I am sleeping badly. I am too ailing to enjoy my friends, and I find myself bad company. I want some one who is everything that I am not—young, healthy, happy, gay—to lighten up my sombre drawing-room and my

silent house. My servants, I can see, are getting quite depressed. Now I have made a clean breast of it, my dear Olivia, are you prepared for a noble act of self-sacrifice? I want you to read to me, to sing to me, to play to me, to chatter to me, to listen when I chatter to you; to enliven me. Come my dear, and earn an old lady's gratitude. Give my love to your father, and ask him to spare you to me.'

Olivia was greatly excited at the invitation, and somewhat awed at the idea of a *tête-à-tête* visit to so impressive a hostess. Her father at once overruled her scruples at leaving him alone, and entered with zest into the spirit of the expedition. 'It will give me an excuse for a visit to London,' he said, 'which I like of all things. I shall enjoy my Olivia's enjoyment as much as she does. It is a reward for her patience under misfortunes, her content with a humble home; and, besides, I would do anything for Lady Heriot, my dear and excellent friend. I wish old ladies nowadays kept private chaplains. That would be the post for me. Meanwhile my Olivia will see the world, and the world will see my Olivia and be delighted with her. She will be admired, she will be loved as she deserves. I have been a horrid old monopolist to keep you here. Go, child, where fortune calls you.'

CHAPTER VI

A GREEN OLD AGE

> 'Sydneian showers
> Of sweet discourse, whose powers
> Can crown old Winter's head with flowers.'

THE aspect of Lady Heriot's house was not, at first sight, exhilarating. Its magnificence was of that solid, comfortable order which, above everything, dislikes to be too fine. Some of the drawing-rooms, to which Olivia now accompanied her hostess for five-o'clock tea, were a great deal too fine for Lady Heriot's taste. 'They ought to be put in a glass case and sent to the South Kensington Museum,' she told Olivia, as they got home from a visit to a specially ornate abode; 'but to live in—no, thank you, my dear; give me a comfortable sofa, near enough to the fire, and not a wilderness of fine things where one cannot walk with safety or sit at ease. Every silly young woman of the present day wants to make her drawing-room a palace of art; I like mine to be the home of conversation; and homes should be snug and comfortable, and not too smart. I want my visitors not to admire my gimcracks, but to talk to me and amuse me——'

'And admire you,' said Olivia, always ready with an agreeable suggestion, 'as they all do. All the same, Lady Heriot, the pretty things are wonderfully pretty, and if one cannot think of anything to say, as is often my plight, it is a comfort to look at them and find something to talk about.'

'You may talk about this sofa, if you please,' said her

companion, settling herself comfortably upon it. 'Is it not a good one? Tell me the truth.'

'Well, then,' said Olivia, 'it is a good one, of course, but I don't like those red and white roses; they stand up so that one hardly dares to sit down upon them.'

'My dear,' said Lady Heriot, 'that only shows how well they are painted. My sofa is a beauty; at any rate it is quite fine enough for an old woman like me to rest my bones on. Those roses were greatly admired, I can tell you, when I first set them up, and a great many good people have sat upon them since then, and so I love them. As for cabinets, mine are old enough and odd enough, in all conscience; and they are full of Dresden and Sèvres shepherdesses, I believe, for those who care about them, which I do not happen to do.'

Olivia was speedily converted to the inartistic simplicity of her hostess's abode, and found herself quite at home in it. It was a most amusing place. Lady Heriot's privileges as an invalid warranted just enough disorder to enhance comfort and banish the possibility of stiffness. Old age, like other infirmities, may, in skilful hands, become an element of social success. People came to see Lady Heriot in compliance with her petition to take pity on an old woman whose infirmities debarred her from the pleasures of the outside world. They invariably found a cheerful hostess, better posted up than themselves in current gossip, longing to know of what was going on in the world, and quite prepared to meet them half way in being amusing and amused. Lady Heriot had not lived all those years for nothing; she had known a host of people all the time her husband had been in Parliament, some of them already beginning to be historical. She remembered a story and knew how to tell it. Her five-o'clock tea was a most popular beverage; and quite a little crowd would gather to drink it. So it came about that, in the course of the afternoon, a great many nice people dropped in, and left a small residuum of wit behind them. It is a great thing to know a house where the hostess is always at home, and always delighted to see you. There

were several elderly gentlemen who would have considered a Sunday in town exceptionally ill spent, part of which had not been passed by the side of Lady Heriot's sofa. Stonehouse, the distinguished Queen's Counsel and M.P., who had no leisure for ordinary society, managed to forget his briefs and his clients, and unbent his great intellect under the soothing influence of Lady Heriot's companionship; Mr. Pygmalion, a power in the world of art, was well pleased to convey to her the latest gossip from the Royal Academy; Dr. Crucible deserted his favourite arm-chair at the Athenæum in order to bring an amusing book or expound the newest theory that stirred the philosophic world; now it would be Lord Melrose, an accomplished ex-diplomat, untiring collector and retailer of every form of social curiosity; now Desmond, an Irish Dean, providentially supplied with a never-failing cruse of excellent stories at his countrymen's expense. Even young Mr. de Renzi, the brightest of rising political stars, who was in great request and capable of giving himself airs with common mortals, never showed them to Lady Heriot, but would come and spend a pleasant half hour, and take real pains to be amusing. Lady Heriot's panegyric on her sofa was, Olivia felt, extremely well-deserved.

When they were alone together, Lady Heriot proved a delightful companion. 'Tis pleasant,' she said one day as the door closed upon the last departing guest—

> '"'Tis pleasant, through the loopholes of retreat,
> To peep at such a world, to see the stir
> Of the great Babel, and not feel the crowd"—

The trade of being an old lady is not such a bad one, is it, Olivia? Every one is so kind to me. But you have been indoors too long, and are losing your roses. Go out now with my excellent Phillips and have a good walk across the park. Then we will go on with our third volume, which I am longing to hear.'

Olivia was under a spell. Lady Heriot looked older and frailer than she remembered her at Huntsham, and was gentler than ever. She touched Olivia by her cordial

enjoyment of the pleasures of life—already quickly passing beyond her reach — by considerate care, by unobtrusive contrivances to amuse her guest. There is something solemn in one's communications with the old—so soon to cease. They have the air of a farewell. A subtle, tender melancholy breathes over the commonplaces of everyday life; a thousand little monitions remind us that the end is drawing near.

Youth is beautiful, but there is a beauty about a good old age which rivals youth, and a pathos that is all its own. Old age—wise, calm, and patient—that has learnt from the troubles of life the divine lesson of compassion—old age, that

> 'dares send
> A challenge to his end,
> And, when it comes, say, "Welcome, friend" '—

old age, refined by experience into generous sympathy—for which the struggles of life are over, but not its interests—which kindles over the new life that is coming up,—which views the turmoils of existence as from some mountain height, through an atmosphere which softens each crude colour and dulls each harsh outline—what better things have youth and strength to show us? what more dignified, more ennobling, more really beautiful, like mellow music, good for heart and nerves?

So Olivia found her life very interesting, very charming, and, in a charming way, a little sad.

In many effusive letters to her father she portrayed her impressions of Lady Heriot's companionship. The visit was doing her good in every way—in mind, and, through the mind, in body. She caught something of her companion's serenity. It added to her happiness that Lady Heriot petted her with much admiring solicitude, made much of her performances on the pianoforte, and greatly appreciated her literary tastes. Olivia's musical education had been but scanty; but taste and love had supplemented it with a hundred unstudied graces. Her father loved a good tune, and sang Moore's melodies in soft tenor tones, which often brought the tears into Olivia's eyes as she

accompanied him. Many a well-loved and familiar air had Olivia studied for her father's benefit and filled their quiet evenings with delight. Now Lady Heriot bade her produce them, and remembered one old friend after another—as she sat listening in the twilight—and, as each piece ended, would still beg for another, and applaud the performance with sympathetic cordiality. She took Olivia's hand fondly, as she came from the piano and sat beside her: 'That is quite a treat, my dear; yours is the way that I like people to play—not too difficult for unlearned ears and simple tastes—and playing all as if you loved it, as I know you do, and so do I.'

'You are such a good listener, Lady Heriot,' said Olivia, greatly delighted; 'that is half the battle when one plays; some people freeze the very soul within one. But for you! I love these airs all the better when I know that you are listening to them.'

'I have heard some delightful music in my day,' said her companion, 'and I am the better for it, the richer. I lie sometimes in the silence of a sleepless night and recall some hours of enjoyment that have enriched my life for ever after. Music is a kind goddess; she is good to the old people and infirm: she does not, as some pleasures do, keep all her favours for the young, the vigorous, the bright, who least stand in need of consolation. When, in the guise of a sweet young lady, she comes and sits by my sofa and fills my ears with tuneful echoes of old days, I like her very much indeed. But you must be quite tired.'

'No, indeed,' cried Olivia, to whom this sort of talk made the idea of fatigue seem very remote, 'I only feel refreshed. You must have a great store of nice recollections?'

'Yes,' said her companion, 'they are the riches of the old; our compensation for some things which we old people cannot have—some pleasures which have ceased to please—some hopes extinguished—some companionship that we may share no more this side the grave. Meanwhile our store of happy memories is for ever growing. With pleasant memories and good books one is always well off.'

'Ah!' said Olivia, 'your books! You have got some good ones indeed!'

'Yes,' said the other, 'they are among one's best friends indeed as one gets on in years. One advantage of being seventy, and lame, and too ill to move about, is that one has leisure to read, and need not be so shamefully illiterate as the busy people always are. "A good book," Milton said, "is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life." But then I am not always so fortunate as to have any one who reads to me so well as you do. I cannot tell you, my dear, what it is to have some delightful volume pumped over one by an uninterested and unsympathetic reader: it is often my fate. My good Phillips is a paragon, as you see; but for reading! her suppressed yawns! her inconceivable mistakes! her blank indifference to what she is about! her sudden arrest in the midst of something really delightful to give me my medicine or put me to bed! It is hard to bear. As for your Cousin Isabella, she reads worse than Phillips does. So you see, my dear, your reading is a real holiday to me. I enjoy it thoroughly.'

'And I too enjoy it,' said Olivia; 'a nice book, like solitude, is all the nicer for some one to whom one can say how nice it is. And then your books are very nice.'

So Olivia found that her services were in great request, and went roaming about her dear hostess's well-filled shelves for something that would prove congenial reading. Many a half-forgotten volume did she bring to light. The two would settle down with real excitement, on some new-found treasure.

'Good, good,' Lady Heriot would say, her eyes lighting up with pleasure and animation; 'you are a good girl, Olivia, a clever girl. The worst of it is that I shall never be able to get on without you.'

CHAPTER VII

GLORIOUS APOLLO

'In the very May-morn of his youth,
Ripe for exploits and mighty enterprises.'

So Olivia lingered on, fortified by cheerful injunctions from her father to enjoy a good time while it lasted, and loth to leave the dear friend who needed her so much, and was goodness itself to her. Several of the frequenters of Lady Heriot's drawing-room soon understood Olivia's charm, and began to be very polite to her. Dr. Crucible took her over his Museum, and devoted an afternoon to explaining its wonders and mysteries. Mrs. Hazelden carried her off to a concert, where music—such as Olivia's imagination had never dreamt of—the symphony of a perfect orchestra, or the miracles of a master-hand or voice, sent her home oppressed with happy rapture. Stonehouse astonished even Lady Heriot—who knew the kind heart that glowed under an exterior of stately politeness—by volunteering to come and dine, and afterwards escort Olivia to the play. 'Would Olivia like it?' Olivia, who had never set foot in a theatre, and to whom her father's stories and recitations had conveyed a vague but delightful conception of the glories of the stage! Stonehouse, who awed everybody, possessed no terrors for Olivia. The two went off in great glee and came back in the highest spirits, declaring that they had had a delightful evening. Everybody, Olivia began to feel, was conspiring to pet her. Not least among the excitements, which at this time stirred existence to a ferment, was the intelligence that Lady Heriot was bent on

giving her a lovely dress, such as the female imagination might rejoice to think of, and youth and beauty rejoice to wear — and that Mrs. Hazelden, in furtherance of this benevolent design, had already arranged a pilgrimage with her to an illustrious mistress of that imperial art. Olivia was woman enough to feel this a very soul-stirring event indeed.

Still greater excitements were, however, awaiting her. One afternoon, when Lady Heriot's tea-party was at its height, a visitor was announced, whose manner and appearance bespoke him not in the roll of common men. It was Mr. de Renzi. His visit was, if the truth is to be told, due to one of Mrs. Valentine's ingenious arrangements of her little world. 'I want you,' she had said to him, as they passed each other on a crowded staircase the night before, 'to go and pay a visit to my mother; she is in need of amusement. You will be a godsend.'

'What a curious name to call me!' said De Renzi; 'of course I will go. I want cheering too. Lady Heriot always infects me with some of her own cheerfulness; and, besides, Mrs. Heriot's word is law.'

'That is very nice of you,' said the other; 'it will be angelic if you will go. Moreover, it is a known fact that virtue often finds a reward where she least expects it.'

'A reward!' cried De Renzi; 'what can you mean?'

'Nothing,' said Mrs. Valentine; 'virtue is its own reward, and reverence to old age one of the most agreeable of virtues. Only go, like a good creature.'

'And I shall be rewarded?' asked her companion.

'By a good conscience,' said Mrs. Valentine,—'best of all rewards.'

'But that I have already,' said De Renzi, 'and I am tired of it.'

'And my approval; you are not tired of *that*, I hope.'

'You already think me perfection.'

'Vanity!' cried Mrs. Valentine; 'how little people know! But I shall think you several degrees less removed from it if you do as I ask you.'

'Mysterious!' said De Renzi, 'but I obey.'

'Mystery,' said his companion, looking back, as the crowd swept her downstairs, 'mystery is our prerogative and obedience our foible. Good-night, and thank you.'

De Renzi had gone, accordingly, to Seymour Street and found a room full of people—one little group gathered about Lady Heriot, and another round the tea-table, where Olivia was busily ministering to the wants of Lady Heriot's guests. Amongst the latter Dr. Crucible was occupying a favoured post, and was thoroughly enjoying himself. Olivia was beaming upon him with unsuspicious gaiety, grateful for being so well amused, and speaking her gratitude with radiant smiles. De Renzi realised the position at a glance. He made his way to Lady Heriot's sofa; she gave him a place on it.

'Who is the beauty,' he said presently, looking in Olivia's direction, 'who presides, like a young goddess, at your tea-table, Lady Heriot—a fresh-alighted Hebe?'

'That is my new maid of honour,' Lady Heriot said; 'a goddess, as you rightly observe. My Olympus required a Hebe. She is known to mortals as Miss Hillyard. As young men generally want to worship goddesses on the spot, you may, if you please, take my cup to her and ask her for another.'

De Renzi sped joyfully on his mission. 'Lady Heriot bids me introduce myself,' he said, 'and ask you for a second cup; and may I have one for myself?'

Olivia had never before felt shy. Why, in the name of common sense, should shyness now suddenly beset her?

Who was this Apollo-like being, who had risen suddenly into her horizon—bright, impressive, delightful, and, perhaps because of his delightfulness, alarming? What is the secret of the spell that mortals exercise on one another, the spell that dominates, fascinates, and thrills? No explanation can be given except that Heaven has been pleased so to construct, or misconstruct, us that some people have a most unaccountable effect on other people's nerves. Olivia experienced this physiological truth just now with disagreeable acuteness. It was a relief when, after a few sentences, De Renzi left her.

'What a beauty!' he said as he rejoined Lady Heriot, 'and how divinely fresh! Has she ever, till this afternoon, held converse with mortal man? I suppose you had her straight from heaven.'

'Where, naturally,' said Mrs. Hazelden, 'she had but few opportunities of making male acquaintance. Well, Mr. de Renzi, if you were the first, I hope that you took pains to make a good impression. The race of man will owe you a grudge if you have prepossessed her against them.'

'Awful responsibility!' cried De Renzi; 'but she was too frightened, I am certain, to form a prepossession.'

'Perhaps,' said Mrs. Hazelden, 'the first man a girl knows is generally the beginning of her disillusions.'

'Possibly,' said De Renzi; 'the fate of humanity is disillusion. Young ladies must be disillusionised like the rest of us. Men may be Nature's humble instrument. It may correspond to the acute form of it, which they themselves experience when they enter public life.

'Some of us amuse ourselves, during the debates, by rewriting the English poets and improving them. We have just brought out a new edition of "Hohenlinden" for use at Westminster. Allow me to recite a verse—

> "A combat threatens,—off, ye crave
> 'n souls, who seek your seats to save!
> Waive, traitors, all your scruples waive,
> And change with all your perfidy!"'

'Well,' said Lady Heriot, 'there I agree with you. You young politicians, I admit, have seen enough to make you cynics. The science of politics has been swamped in the art of tergiversation.'

'As it always must,' said Mrs. Hazelden, 'with mob-rule. When you have to court a lot of irrational people the way to please them is to do the most irrational thing you can think of. Sudden and meaningless change is one form—and a striking one—of irrationality. There are people who think that the only proper use of a coat is to turn it.'

'Now,' said De Renzi, 'I have Mrs. Hazelden on my

side, and I can go away in safety and talk to the young goddess, who, I daresay, like other goddesses, young and old, requires adoration. Mrs. Hazelden, I leave my reputation in your hands.'

'A dangerous place to leave it in,' observed Stonehouse, as De Renzi was retreating.

'He is a horrid young cynic,' said Mrs. Hazelden;—

> '"Would he oblige me? Let me only find
> He does not think me what he thinks mankind."

As for what he thinks womankind, no one can even venture to conjecture.'

'He appears to think some portions of it worth cultivation,' said Stonehouse, glancing in the direction where De Renzi had already succeeded in establishing himself by Olivia's chair, and was bending over her with an air of deferential interest. 'All work and no play makes Jack a dull politician.'

'Yes,' said Mrs. Hazelden, 'and most men have taken care to protect themselves from that particular way of getting dull. Unfortunately there are others.'

'Well,' said Crucible, who, dislodged by De Renzi, had joined Lady Heriot's group, 'De Renzi is a good judge. The young lady is delightful—

> '"A rosebud, set with little wilful thorns,
> As sweet as English air can make her, she"—

I feel a pang of jealousy even at this distance.'

'Perhaps,' said Stonehouse, 'it is jealousy which leads me to observe that De Renzi's cynicism is a very mild affair. It merely means that there is a great deal of humanity in human nature, and that the parts of it with which politics are concerned, are not the best.'

'Of course,' said Crucible, 'man being asinine, statesmen have to ride their parties, as boys do donkeys, as near as possible upon the tail.'

'And,' said Mrs. Hazelden, 'as far as possible from the seat of intelligence.'

'What a simile!' said Stonehouse; 'a libel on party government in disguise!'

'Party government!' said Mrs. Hazelden, 'it is an old story—a limited democracy that has destroyed the limitations. The thirty cleverest people in England trying to govern the country, and the thirty next eleverest trying to prevent them—the leaders hoping to save themselves by abandoning their principles, like the parents in the Russian story, by pitching their children to the wolves.'

'The worst of that sort of business,' said Stonehouse, 'is that, sooner or later, the time comes when all the children are used up, and the parents have to decide which shall make jettison of the other.'

'Yes,' said Lady Heriot, 'but, meanwhile, the process is delightfully easy, like the road to Avernus.'

'All the roads to that place,' said Crucible, 'are delightful. It is the journey back that is the rub. They don't issue return-tickets on that line.'

'Anyhow, said Stonehouse, 'the pace is fast and furious. It is the case of the horse and cart galloping down hill. No one—least of all the horse—knows whether the horse is running away with the cart, or the cart with the horse.'

'But we can all make a shrewd guess,' said Crucible, 'what will happen at the bottom of the hill.'

'My nerves are weak,' said Lady Heriot, 'and I congratulate myself on the probability that I shall not be there to see.'

CHAPTER VIII

SIC ITUR AD ASTRA

'On dit que dans ses amours
Il fut caressé des belles,
Qui le suivirent toujours
Tant qu'il marcha devant elles.'

THE great house of De Renzi was a name to conjure with. It was in force wherever finance on a grand scale was stirring, from Gallipoli to San Francisco. It swayed exchanges, it negotiated loans, it floated railways, it inspired syndicates, it turned the flow of capital this way or that; with a word, a look, markets rose or fell; investors trembled before it as mortals at the nod of Olympian Jove. Now, too, the family had become political and social. Former generations had dominated finance; the present achieved something more, the conquest of society. The father of the present head of the family had signalised its triumph by becoming a Christian, a baronet and an English gentleman. Lady de Renzi's parties were among the smartest, the best, the most sought after, the most written about and talked about in polite London. Two daughters of the family had made distinguished marriages and had carried welcome streams of gold to thirsty regions of the aristocratic world. Two more remained, the cynosure of eager eyes on the look-out for a splendid and profitable alliance. Claude de Renzi's career at Eton and Christchurch had been worthy of his family and himself—characteristically brilliant. The young undergraduate had well maintained the traditional standard of ability and

splendour. No golden youth ever lavished an ample patrimony with more refined prodigality. His parties, his hunters, the exquisite luxury of his rooms, his carefully chosen and splendidly attired library, his collection of priceless inutilities—dear to the heart of the connoisseur—had thrown all rival spendthrifts into the shade, and realised to the ready enthusiasm of his contemporaries the impressive conception of a modern Alcibiades. Grave pedants shook their heads at a license, which not even the wise catholicity of academic indulgence could quite condone. But then pedants were exactly the people whom young De Renzi least cared to conciliate. The tasks which Alma Mater enjoined, and for which she reserved her choicest honours and prizes, revolted him. They had been designed surely, to produce that special quality of erudite narrow-mindedness which is the attribute of priests and the qualification of schoolmasters. At any rate they were not worthy the self-denial and effort necessary for their accomplishment—worth the pleasures of eye, ear, taste, which civilisation brings within the reach of a refined epicurean!

His college triumphs over, Claude de Renzi had renewed them in London on a more daring scale. His good looks, his brilliant audacity, his vivacious readiness of talk, his well-planned hospitalities soon made him the fashion. His house became presently a favourite resort, as beautiful as art, wealth, and good taste could make it. Fine ladies were delighted to drink tea there, or to bring their daughters to contemplate this modern Mæcenas in his own domain. There were other parties too to which ladies did not come, but which none the less had a celebrity of their own. Claude was an adept in the arts of hospitality. His suppers achieved fame, and deserved it. Artists and authors, actors, actresses—beautiful women and accomplished men—the rising politician, the witty journalist, the lion of the hour, found themselves in a côterie, which each helped to make varied, brilliant, and amusing. To crown all, De Renzi had fought an election with skill, courage, and address, had made a successful maiden speech, and had established a reputation as one of the rising lights of his

party. He seemed likely to be great; and Mrs. Valentine, who had a quick eye for greatness, present or prospective, was delighted to have so notable a guest for little dinners, to which his presence added amusement and *éclat.* One of these was now impending, and Mrs. Valentine responded promptly to her mother-in-law's wish that Olivia should be well amused, by inviting her to fill a vacant place. Mr. Stonehouse and Pygmalion were to be among the other guests.

Mrs. Heriot, expert in her management of mankind, was accustomed, on these occasions, to send De Renzi in to dinner with a pretty woman, and to let him sit next herself.

De Renzi had thus a twofold obligation to render himself agreeable. The beauty provided on this occasion for him was Mrs. Backhouse, a brilliant being, one of the brightest luminaries in Mrs. Valentine's social horizon. Her beauty acquired additional interest from the circumstance that her husband was making, or had made, a colossal fortune on the Stock Exchange. There was, too, Stoddart, who represented a Scotch borough, and had just returned from a rough encounter with his constituents. Several of the guests were already intimate with each other; those who were not desired to become so. All wished to please and hoped to be pleased. Everything promised favourably. Mrs. Valentine's guests were always confident in her power to consort them agreeably and to feed them well.

De Renzi found Mrs. Backhouse delightful, and between his two ladies, both of whom required attention, had his hands full; but he was undaunted by the emergency. Everybody was talking too fast to allow of personal attention, and, besides, Mr. Pygmalion, on Mrs. Backhouse's other side, was bent on absorbing her if De Renzi had given him an opportunity. Mrs. Backhouse, however, had no wish to be absorbed, and bent a gracious ear to De Renzi's merry flow of talk.

Stoddart had just been relating some of his experience in being 'heckled.'

'Your constituents have been giving you a treat!' said Stonehouse; 'what a price to pay for the eminence of politics!'

'Eminence!' said Stoddart ruefully; 'abyss, you mean.'

'Stoddart,' said Pygmalion, 'has been realising the truth of an observation of De Tocqueville's, that there is nothing which a man cannot, if necessary, learn to put up with, except the manners of another class than his own.'

'And such a class!' cried Stoddart; 'ignorant, coarse, violent people, vested with power, without a notion how to use it, and roused into a passion by unwholesome doses of rhetoric. Can any one expect to like it?'

'Sir Thomas Browne,' said Pygmalion, 'was always good, but is best about the mob. He had it not in him, he says, to hate anybody, not even Frenchmen for eating frogs and toadstools; nor Jews for their weakness for locusts and grasshoppers; nor a salad gathered in a churchyard; nor serpents, scorpions, or salamanders; nor even that imperial salamander, the devil himself. "But," says that exemplary person, if I remember him rightly, "if there be any among those common objects of hatred I do contemn and laugh at, it is that great enemy of reason, virtue, and religion, the multitude—that numerous piece of monstrosity which, if taken asunder, seem men and the reasonable creatures of God; but, confused together, make a great beast and a monstrosity more prodigious than Hydra."'

'He was a dear man,' said Mrs. Backhouse; 'how I wish he was alive, that one might ask him to five-o'clock tea.'

'Philosophers have observed,' said Stonehouse, 'that mankind is a physic, which, if taken at all, needs to be taken in homœopathic doses—not in such hideous conglomerations as poor Stoddart has had to gulp.'

'It is a fearful illustration,' said Pygmalion, 'of what the evolutionists are preaching to us, the essential bestiality of man. The mob is, as Sir T. Browne said, a great beast.'

'And the mob's idea of evolution,' said Stonehouse, 'is, as Lowell has put it, to spell it with an initial R.'

'But evolution spells itself with an initial R,' said

Pygmalion; 'it is essentially revolutionary. Even in the days of Aristophanes the law of physics—say, the whirlpool theory or the cosmic dust theory, or what you please—had driven the Lord of Olympus off the field. Do you remember the passage, De Renzi? You are the last of us from school.'

'Perfectly,' said De Renzi, 'and the translation—

> '"An age when folk have grown too clever to believe,
> And evolution has disposed of Eve."'[1]

'Poor Eve,' cried Mrs. Valentine, 'the fairest of her daughters she! but she is a ruined woman. Her reputation was hopelessly damaged in *Paradise Lost*. Who will rehabilitate her?'

'I will,' said De Renzi, 'she deserves all the sympathy that you ladies can give her. Her retreat after dinner, when the conversation threatened to become tedious, shows that the enslavement of women began even before the fall of man. Do you remember the lines? I learnt them at Eton for an imposition—

> '"So spake our sire, and by his count'nance seemed
> Entering on studious thoughts abstruse; which Eve
> Perceiving, where she sat retired from sight,
> With loveliness majestic from her seat,
> And grace that won, who saw, to wish her stay,
> Rose, and went forth amid her fruits and flowers,
> To visit how they prospered, bud and bloom,
> Her nursery"'—

'Her nursery!' cried Pygmalion, 'that was a little premature surely.'

'A hint,' cried Mrs. Valentine, 'to us to leave the gentlemen to their cigars; but we refuse to act on the Miltonic precedent.'

'Quite right,' said Pygmalion, 'Milton was a horrid old misogynist. There are some things he said about the first Mrs. Milton that I shudder to remember and refuse to repeat.'

[1] De Renzi must have been thinking of

Δίνος βασιλεῦει τὸν Δί ἐξεληλακώς.

'Which means that you are dying to repeat them,' said Mrs. Backhouse, 'and we to hear. Let us have the worst.'

'Impossible,' said Pygmalion; 'it is enough that Dr. Johnson summed up Milton as atoning for public license by domestic despotism, and as holding that every man was born to be a rebel, and every woman a slave.'

'Inquisitiveness is unallayed,' insisted Mrs. Valentine; 'let us hear the worst.'

'Well,' said Stonehouse, 'what can be worse than bringing a nice young bride from a merry home of Oxfordshire fox-hunters, boring her to death, no doubt, with Puritanic dissertations in the style of *Paradise Lost*, then dubbing her as "mute and insensate," and when the poor creature could bear it no longer and fled to her father's for a respite, starting a flirtation with another woman and propounding "the doctrine and discipline of divorce restored, to the good of both sexes"?'

'That is worst with a vengeance,' said Mrs. Backhouse, 'and Milton too!'

'But then,' put in Mrs. Valentine, 'he was a poet, and poets are chartered libertines, like German sovereigns. A poet may be as eccentric as he pleases.'

'However,' said Stonehouse, 'there is one agreeable trait in the Miltonic scene which Mr. de Renzi omitted. Eve retreated, you may remember, not because she disliked philosophy, but because she liked her husband's way of putting it better than the angel's. She missed the "grateful digression" of an occasional caress.'

'Ah,' said Mrs. Pygmalion, 'I was reading somewhere, the other day, that men always want to stop the mouths of female propagandists by kissing them. They got the hint from Adam.'

'A time-honoured form of argument,' said Stonehouse, 'which we all approve.'

'And too seldom, unfortunately,' said De Renzi, 'get a chance of practising.'

'But,' said Mrs. Backhouse, who occasionally played the *rôle* of the engaging *ingénue*, 'I cannot imagine an angel kissing one—can you?'

'I have kissed angels,' said De Renzi; 'I hope to kiss some more.'

'Well,' said Mrs. Backhouse, 'it is a fact, is it not, that almost all great men have maltreated their wives? Lord Byron and Andrea del Sarto, and Shelley and that sort of person; I never can remember names, but I know that there is quite a list of them.'

'But the Shelley set pressed their privileges too far,' said Pygmalion. 'They got quite into a jumble. Between the different ladies one never can remember who is who.'

'No,' said Stonehouse, 'nor who is whose. Still it is, no doubt, the attribute of genius to make women miserable.'

'Yes, and what a blessing it is,' cried De Renzi, 'and how grateful we ought to be that things are ordered so nicely!'

'I don't see that at all,' said Mrs. Backhouse; 'the wives of the greatest men ought to be the happiest women; oughtn't they?'

'No,' said De Renzi, with enthusiasm; 'the happy woman is lost to society; she ruins her husband and herself. The first condition of social brilliancy is domestic gloom. The modern enchantress must have some high lonely tower where she "may oft outwatch the Bear"; that is, a dull country house and a conjugal bear who goes to bed at ten o'clock. Like the dying dolphin of the Roman banquet, the suffering woman wears a thousand lovely hues. She is brilliant, she is tender, she is sympathetic, she is deliciously confidential, she is eloquently reticent. Once happy, she loses the wish to charm, and, with the wish, the power. She basks in the stupefying sunshine of conjugal felicity; she becomes mute and insensate like Mrs. Milton; she has a nursery full of horrid little pledges of love; the clink of tea-cups and the warbling of babies fill her ears; nurses and governesses bound her horizon; she loses her care for society, the world; she loses her ambition; she loses her figure; she becomes a little dump, or expands, under the fostering influences of domestic bliss, into the elephantine, and goes "stretching many a rood," like the Miltonic Satan, all the vast fabric palpitating with affection.'

'Stop, stop,' cried Mrs. Valentine; 'all of us here are extremely happy. Do you dare to tell us that we are all the horrid things you mention, or ever will be?'

'Every law has its exceptions,' said De Renzi, 'and this law has three charming ones to-night. Besides, it is the prerogative of genius to obey no law.'

'What a dreadful law, though,' said Mrs. Backhouse, 'if one happened not to be one of the exceptions, and what an embarrassing alternative if one had to choose!'

'I should pronounce unhesitatingly for unhappiness,' said Mrs. Pygmalion; 'Mr. de Renzi's portrait of the happy mother quite haunts me.'

'Naturally,' said Pygmalion.

> 'What is your sex's earliest latest care,
> Your heart's supreme ambition? To be fair.'

'This is horrible,' said Mrs. Valentine. 'Let us go away and cultivate a little unhappiness by ourselves. One remark I will make in retreating. If beauty depends on conjugal unhappiness, many of us ought to be a great deal prettier than we are.'

CHAPTER IX

DIPLOMACY

'Ah! that deceit should steal such gentle shapes,
And with a virtuous vizard hide deep vice!'

VALENTINE was furious when he heard of the occurrences at Huntsham—of Jack having been induced to cut off the entail, of the disgraceful episode of the execution. He went to his mother, and speedily infected her with his own indignation. Lady Heriot had been very much aggrieved, and was not difficult to move to actual anger. The whole thing was an indignity; the family name was disgraced. It seemed inconceivable that such an outrage should occur in the home — the house where so many generations of Heriots had lived in honour, plenty, and dignity. So Valentine had no difficulty in raising his mother's displeasure to the level of his own.

'Adrian has disgraced us all,' he said, 'and injured us. To me it is a very tangible injury. What a pleasant thing, when I go into the City, for my friends to be telling about one's brother!'

'We may hope that nobody knows it,' said his mother; 'the bills were paid at once, before any one knew.'

'Not know?' cried Valentine. 'Of course everybody knew; everybody always does know that sort of pleasant news. Depend upon it, such a piece of gossip as that was chattered over, within twenty-four hours, in every drawing-room in the county, in every attorney's office, in every tradesman's back parlour! How nice for me, who have my own way to make in the world, and am dependent for

all I can do on the confidence I inspire! and how much confidence are people likely to feel in a man, the head of whose family is being dunned by tradesmen for their accounts, and haunted by sheriff's officers in his own country house?'

'It is hard, Valentine,' his mother said, 'very hard on you, I quite feel that. Adrian's misfortunes have not fallen on his own shoulders only.'

'Adrian's misfortunes!' cried Valentine, 'I am tired of hearing of them. He has one misfortune, mother, the misfortune of being a fool—an obstinate fool. He would have his way; he knew he was right, you know, like the man in Trollope's story—he would do what he chose, despite of all we could do to stop him: and now what is his position, and what is Jack's?'

'Yes, indeed,' said Lady Heriot; 'poor boy, it is hard on him.'

'He starts life,' Valentine continued, 'a beggar, and all through his father's folly—his patrimony wasted, his position ruined. What on earth is to become of him? We shall have to support him, I suppose, and give him a start in life if he be unlike enough to his father to be capable of starting. But, from all I hear, Jack is as great a fool as Adrian.'

'Poor fellow!' said Lady Heriot, 'that is a strong thing to say of him. But what could we expect? His mother, too!'

'Yes,' said Valentine, 'Eugenia is a fool too, a self-complacent fool. Three people better contrived for making a mess of their concerns I cannot imagine.'

Conversations such as this left their mark on Lady Heriot's mind, and prepared her for a change of purpose. The question began to suggest itself with increased force and frequency, whether she might not be acting in the true interests of her family, as well as administering a well-deserved punishment on its delinquent Head, if she made some change in the existing disposition of her wealth. Hitherto her main object had been to help Adrian generously as the one of her children who most needed help. The family fortunes must be restored, the family honour

saved, and the master of Huntsham be made to stand free from embarrassments. But now all these good objects were past praying for. The disgrace had been incurred. The house and park were in the market. A London tradesman—a fashionable tailor, it was said—was negotiating for it. Lady Heriot's soul grew dark with anger. Righteous indignation is a seductive and dangerous feeling. When once you recognise the right and duty of punishing others, it is difficult to stay your hand in the exercise of the punitive function, and to say how hard the scourge shall fall, and how many blows will adequately meet the culprit's delinquency.

The more Lady Heriot thought it over the more did her feeling of provocation with Sir Adrian and Lady Eugenia grow. They had made a lifelong series of mistakes, and now they had crowned their mismanagement by a disaster, the discredit of which all the family had to share. Why put more money in their way, to follow, no doubt, where so much good money had already gone?

Lady Heriot played with the thought, and found it a consolatory vent for the vexation that Sir Adrian was constantly occasioning her. It was, at present, a toy rather than an expedient, which she thought seriously of adopting. But the idea became familiar, as congenial visitors will. It had made itself at home.

Lady Heriot had made a rule, all her life, never to say anything to her children as to the disposal of her money, nor to allow them to talk to her about it—a rule which none of them had ever ventured to infringe. Now, however, her thoughts were so full of the subject that she could not help hinting at it to Mrs. Valentine. 'I am in great perplexity, Isabella,' she said; 'Adrian's affairs are a source of endless worry to me.'

'Are they?' said Mrs. Valentine; 'I am sorry for that, mother.'

Mrs. Valentine was a woman of tact, and a prudential instinct warned her that the present occasion demanded a display of innocent unconcern, and a complete concealment of feelings which she was conscious of enter-

taining toward the Lord of Huntsham, his wife, and heir. Certain visions had flitted through her brain of what might have been, had things gone a little otherwise than they had —if, for instance, Eugenia, whose contributions to the human race had, with a single exception, been exclusively feminine, had not been fated to prelude the list with a boy. She found it impossible not to remember that, but for the inconvenient intrusion of Jack, her husband's prospects, her own, and those of her little Antinous would have been very different from what they were. That little Antinous! Mrs. Heriot's heart was not a soft one; the vicissitudes of an aspiring existence had hardened it; but for this child there was a spot, where the tender maternal graces flourished, like the garden of wild flowers on the Mer de Glace. No one who—however remotely, however unintentionally—had injured this precious little fellow, could fail to incur his mother's undying animosity. Jack, through circumstances beyond his control, had injured him very much indeed.

As Lady Heriot now approached this delicate topic, generally guarded so sedulously from all approach, her daughter's heart began to beat. She was conscious of the necessity of especial self-control.

'I am perplexed,' Lady Heriot continued, 'perplexed and harassed. It is right for me to do all I can to help Adrian. His dear father would have wished it. I have always intended it; but there are limits.'

Lady Heriot's mood might now, Mrs. Valentine thought, with safety receive a little gentle encouragement. 'It is a grievous trouble,' she said sympathetically; 'Valentine is feeling it very much. He feels it a sort of a stain on the honour of the family.'

'If Adrian had only taken Valentine's advice,' continued Lady Heriot, 'all might have been avoided. But he will be advised by no one.'

'Poor Eugenia!' said Mrs. Valentine.

'I feel it difficult to pity her,' said Lady Heriot; 'she ought to have helped Adrian, but she is helplessness itself. How is one to help such people?'

Mrs. Valentine's inquisitiveness was becoming acute.

'Valentine feels the effects of it,' she said, 'among his business friends. Money likes money, and a family, whose Head cannot pay his tradesmen's bills, is not a connection that City people care about.'

'It is a great shame,' said Lady Heriot, by this time worked into a thoroughly angry mood; 'what am I to do? I have others to think of besides Adrian. I must do justice to all my children, if I can; but how?'

'Valentine's great anxiety,' said Mrs. Valentine, 'is that Adrian should be kept from further trouble. Of late each fresh step has carried him deeper into it. Of course, Valentine would always be ready to stand by his brother; but he may not be able; as was the case the other day about the execution: he really had not the money at his command.'

'Of course not,' said Lady Heriot; 'I found it excessively inconvenient to find the money myself. I believe I sold out at a loss; but I was too hurried to be able to consider that, and too mortified to care. It was a question of disgrace.'

'Such questions may occur again,' said Mrs. Valentine, playing nervously round the suggestion which she longed to make, but dared not, namely, that Valentine should be left master of Lady Heriot's money, with discretion to help his brother at an emergency.

'They may, and they will,' said Lady Heriot with a decisive air; 'I do not intend any more of my money to be wasted, as too much has been already, in paying debts that seem to grow all the faster for paying. The best thing I can do for Adrian and for us all is to protect him from his own indiscretion and his creditors' rapacity. I am certain that he gets horribly cheated.'

'There can be no doubt of that,' said her daughter-in-law. 'A good man of business would soon put his concerns to rights and frighten off the sharks. As it is, the more he has the more they prey upon him.'

'And giving money to Jack,' said Lady Heriot, thinking the matter out exactly in the direction which Mrs. Valentine desired, 'is only giving it to his father.'

'It is a pity that Jack is a socialist,' said Mrs. Valentine, by this time grown courageous by success. 'He came to dine with us the other night and talked like a madman. He has been to their meetings, and gave us a tirade on the coming revolution. If a few of us get our throats cut in the regeneration of society so much the better.'

'The boy is a fool, of course,' said Lady Heriot; 'how could he be anything else? but socialism and revolution! that is past a joke. I will not allow any nonsense of that sort here.'

'The worst of it is,' said the diplomatist, 'that he is in love with Olivia Hillyard. Eugenia had them both together at Huntsham, left them for a fortnight to make love to each other—the one thing, it appears, that Jack is an adept at —and now professes to be astonished at the result. Of course it would be his ruin and the girl's, or Adrian would not have encouraged it.'

Lady Heriot said nothing, but that evening she wrote a note to Mr. Graves begging him to come and call upon her at his earliest convenience.

Valentine was rather taken aback when his wife reported to him her afternoon's conversation with his mother. 'I do not want to do Adrian a bad turn,' he said; 'I do not care about the money.'

'Don't you?' said his wife; 'Well, I do. I will not see £50,000 slip out of our fingers if I can help it. Why, Valentine, you are as soft as Adrian. Think of his last letter to you.'

This last letter was a sore point. Valentine was a good-natured man, as far as business allows of good nature; but his amiability was not proof against his brother's rudeness. Adrian's letter had been angry, unreasonable, offensive. He had applied to Valentine at the crisis of the execution, and begged him to back a bill which his bankers then would honour. 'For God's sake, Valentine,' he had written, 'stand by me now, like a good fellow, and help me to pull through. If I can only get a little time to look about me, all can be arranged. I have settled to sell the Hargrove timber, and I give you my word of honour I can and will meet the bill. Blood is thicker than water, old fellow—I count on you.'

Blood may be thicker than water and be very poor stuff for all that. Valentine fumed over the letter. His wife read it with derisive laughter. The result showed that Adrian's experience of human nature, at any rate of the fraternal side of it, was incomplete. Valentine's answer was courteous, regretful, but firm. Backing bills was the one thing he never did, never had done, and never would, for any one—not even for his brother. It would be absolutely fatal to his reputation to have it known that he had been guilty of such an indiscretion. 'I am a poorer man than you think, Adrian,' he had written. 'The most valuable thing I have is my credit; and where would my credit be if paper with our joint signatures on it were once to get about? I had far rather send you the sum you want at once. I would if I could, but it is impossible. I am hard run just now, and it is all that I can do to meet my business calls. Times are as bad with us business people as with you country gentlemen. I am truly sorry.'

Then Sir Adrian had breathed a deep oath and written the objectionable letter—the letter of a proud, sensitive man, who has humbled himself in vain, and who thinks he does well to be angry at his bootless humiliation. Wise men know that of all profitless, expensive, foolish things, an angry letter is the worst. It can do no good; it cannot be forgiven or forgotten; it cannot be toned down by manner or voice; it cannot be recalled. There it stands, in damning black and white, for the recipient to read over, in what mood he pleases, and to make the worst of. Valentine and his wife had read Sir Adrian's letter and had felt it to be very bad. Adrian was an impossible man at the best of times; but Adrian in a passion! it was piteous. So when Mrs. Valentine bade her husband remember his brother's letter, she laid her adroit hand on a very tender spot. Valentine found comfort in reflecting that he had himself never broached the subject, and that conversations between his wife and mother were matters which, however much he wished, he was practically powerless to control.

CHAPTER X

LE FOU QUI CROIT AU LENDEMAIN

'Is the world so bad,
While I hear nothing of it through the trees?
The world was always evil; but so bad?'
'So bad, Aurora, dear; my spirit is grey
With poring over the long sum of ill.'

JACK, it was now certain, could not hope to live, like a gentleman, in quiet enjoyment of ancestral rents. That dream had passed. He must earn his living by sinew or by brain. Jack's sinews were of the best order, cultivated into exuberant prowess by all the varieties of athleticism in which young English gentlemen consider it necessary to be proficient. He had played cricket, rowed, hunted and fished, scaled Alpine heights, and persecuted the dwindling population of his father's coverts till he looked a young Hercules. If legs could win in the race of life, or stalwart arms secure its prizes, Jack's fortune would have been assured. His brain, too, was not amiss, though never as severely disciplined as his outer man. He could think, and, as his father was constrained to admit, he could argue. Just now his head was packed full of socialist theories, the fallacy of which Sir Adrian felt it a solemn duty as a father, a landowner, and a loyal subject to expose. These extravagant ideas were the fruit of a visit which Jack had paid to an old college friend who was now a curate in Shoreditch, who found no difficulty in convincing Jack by ocular demonstration that ours is not the best of all possible worlds, and that the conditions of human life—human life in Shore-

ditch, at any rate—were very far indeed from being what they ought to be. Jack had seen sights and heard sounds that sent him shivering away, and haunted him afterwards like a nightmare. His eager brain was on fire—he was prepared for radicalism, socialism, revolution, anything except acquiescence in a realised pandemonium. He broke in upon the still atmosphere of his father's dinner-table with blasts of declamation. One evening, when Hillyard was a guest, the conversation turned on the problem of great cities, and when Lady Eugenia had retired, Jack gave the gentlemen the benefit of some of his London experiences. His hearers seemed to him strangely unimpressed.

'My dear Jack,' said Hillyard as he passed the claret jug on to him, 'what call in the world have you to go and dip your clean young fingers in fœce Romuli? It is dirty stuff, and always will be dirty, I am afraid, and there is a great deal of it. You would have employed these lovely days far better in fishing in the stream here, and learning the kindly lessons that Nature preaches. Everything about London is oppressively big, its crime and miseries among the rest. There are some things which it is well for young folks to leave alone—the London slums, perhaps, among them.'

'Ah, sir,' cried Jack, by this time kindling into something like explosive heat, 'how easy it is to call them "slums" and have done with it! But do you realise what it means, that millions should be living like brute beasts, without the wholesome customs and instincts of the brutes.'

'Come, come, Jack,' said his father, 'you are pitching it too high, surely. These poor people, who have shocked you so much, are badly off enough, no doubt; a good many of them because they will spend in beer what they ought to spend on their families: but are you sure that they are as bad, or that their life is as wretched as you fancy? I do not believe it.'

'No, father,' cried Jack, 'no one could believe it without seeing, and no one cares to see; and so every one disbelieves. But go about the lanes and alleys in the East End and see the life that people have to live, and the dens they

live in. It is not life; it has none of the things that make life tolerable.'

'Not tolerable to *you*,' said Hillyard, 'but tolerable, demonstrably, to *them*, inasmuch as they tolerate it.'

'Yes,' cried Jack, 'but for how long? This monster—the masses—which we have allowed to grow up, miserable, depraved, with nothing to care for, nothing to fear, nothing to hope—it will turn upon society and rend us; it will clutch, some day, at the pleasures which we have monopolised; it will break its bonds; it will destroy the society which provided for it nothing but toil, poverty, and crime. I for one shall cry, "God speed."'

'When you go on in that way, Jack,' said his father, refilling his glass, 'you talk like a madman. Tall talk and hot talk on such subjects is the very mischief. Supposing these poor people, whose lot troubles you so much, are roused into violence, and succeed in destroying society, what next? Will they be better off when they have driven the capitalist to other countries? when they have destroyed our trade, as they easily may, for the English capitalist has a hard time of it already? when they have broken up the most orderly, peaceable, prosperous community the world has ever seen? for it is so, Jack, you cannot get over the figures. The working classes, whatever miseries you see, are better off than ever before. If they could only be cured of intemperance they might enjoy a prosperity the like of which the world has never seen. Surely it is only madmen and fanatics who would dash such a fabric to pieces on the chance of something better rising from its ruins.'

'That is always said,' cried Jack.

'But if it is true,' said Hillyard, taking the opportunity to fill his glass and push the bottle across to Sir Adrian, 'the oftener it is said the better. Recollect, it is God's world, not ours.'

'I sometimes doubt it,' said Jack; 'God, at any rate, has left it to its fate—perhaps as a bad job.'

'That is a sort of atheism,' said his father; 'take care what you say.'

'Yes, Jack,' said Mr. Hillyard, 'and take care what you feel. The world, no doubt, has many things awry: but that sort of talking has never helped to cure them.'

'And what does religion do?' cried Jack, 'if you could see the Shoreditch public-houses of a Sunday evening!—

> '"This world that we have made,
> They say God made it first, but, if He did,
> 'Twas so long since; and, since, we have spoiled it so,
> He scarce would know it, if He looked this way,
> From hells we preach of, with the flames blown out."'

'It is not spoilt here, at any rate,' said Hillyard, getting up and going to the window, which opened upon the lawn, where the last sweet lights of an evening summer day were pouring a mellow glow on lawn and flower beds and distant woodland. 'Come, Jack, and see something that God certainly made, and man—spoiler though he may be—has not succeeded in spoiling. What a delicious evening, and what a gush of song from that nightingale in the old thorn tree! "Hic sæpe Faunorum voces exauditæ, sæpe formæ visæ deorum." Such an evening as this preaches one a good sermon, does it not? a better one perhaps than the sights of horror of which you have been telling us.'

Hillyard laid his hand kindly on Jack's shoulder and led him out upon the lawn, and then went back to Sir Adrian, who loved a chat over his claret.

Jack went in to his mother through the drawing-room window.

'How excited you look, dear!' she said, stroking his forehead and pushing away his hair, which was tumbling about it. 'What have you been quarrelling about—politics?'

'Listen to this, mother,' said Jack, taking up a volume which lay on the table and looking for the place he wanted. 'This is what we have been quarrelling about,' and then he read: '"Who does not know the temper of the man of the world, that worst enemy of the world? His inexhaustible patience of abuses that only torment others; his apologetic word for beliefs that may, perhaps, not be so precisely true

as one might wish, and institutions which are not altogether so useful as one might think possible; his cordiality towards progress and improvement in a general way and his coldness or antipathy to each progressive proposal in particular; his pigmy hope that life will one day become somewhat better, punily shivering by the side of his gigantic conviction that it might well be infinitely worse?" That is good, is it not? Father and Mr. Hillyard are just deciding over their claret that Shoreditch might easily be a great deal grimier than I found it, and that the Shoreditch needlewomen on sixpence a day have every reason to be well content. I came away because I felt in such a rage: when you find parsons defending the infamies of the world it makes one hate the very name of religion.'

'Hush, Jack,' said his mother, 'you don't really mean that, I'm sure. Irreligion, I have just been reading, is the elder sister of revolution.'

'I should think none the worse of it for that,' said Jack; presently the two gentlemen appeared and summoned Jack and his mother to their evening rubber.

Be Jack's opinions what they might, it had become necessary to provide him with an employment in life.

'If you like to go into orders Jack,' his father had once said, 'you could have Huntsham some day. Poor old Porter will soon be going; he is getting very infirm.'

'Not for the world, father, thank you,' cried Jack; 'if I went into orders at all I should be an East End curate; but I cannot. That is not my vocation; though I should like it in many ways—missionary work among the worst sort of savages, home-grown ones; but I cannot.'

This was not the view in which the Church presented itself to Sir Adrian, to whom one of its functions seemed to be the providing a respectable sphere for such members of the landed classes as were not eldest sons and chose to adopt an unambitious career. It mattered the less, because it was now clear that, neither as a country rector nor as an East End curate would Jack put on the Churchman's frock.

But then what was to be done with him? Sir Adrian's vague notions that something could be found for him in

London faded to a dreary blank when they were brought to the test of practical realisation. He consulted Mr. Graves, and that gentleman's advice—exact, business-like, matter of fact—was the reverse of encouraging. The Bar was, as Sir Adrian well knew, a long, expensive, and hazardous experiment. Jack was too old for the army, not studious enough for the Civil Service.

On the whole, Mr. Graves thought that Valentine's influence in the City was the likeliest chance. He might find an opening for him, or, at any rate, a useful training.

Lady Eugenia had entreated her husband not to quarrel with his brother. The wisdom of her advice was now apparent. Nothing would induce Sir Adrian to write to Valentine again; nor would it be proper that he should. Then Lady Eugenia, who would have stripped the clothes off her back for her darling son, put her pride in her pocket, and, without informing Sir Adrian of what she was about, wrote to Valentine a quiet, dignified letter. 'Would Valentine forget their quarrel and help Jack and his parents in this grave emergency?' It is good policy to confer favours which cost one nothing, and agreeable to put oneself conspicuously in the right. Valentine was influenced by both considerations. Nor did he harbour any real bitterness against his brother, except the latent resentment that a successful man naturally feels at failure, and a shrewd man at bungling. He was haunted by scruples, to which his wife was a stranger. He cared, indeed, first of all for himself, his own success, his wife, his child; but he cared also for his childhood's home, the companion of his boyhood, his family name. Mrs. Valentine regarded her brother-in-law's reverses with indifference, if not actual satisfaction. Steel his heart as he would, Valentine could not think of them without a pang.

So Valentine answered Lady Eugenia's request with a gracious alacrity that did credit to his brotherly affection. He had forgiven Adrian's angry speeches, and was only anxious to give what help he could. He knew of nothing at the moment which was likely to answer, but he would think it over. Eugenia should hear from him shortly

again. Meanwhile he would do his best, and was her affectionate brother.

Lady Eugenia took this small modicum of comfort for what it was worth, and did not think it necessary to make her husband participate in what might, after all, prove only a treacherous hope. She answered Valentine effusively. 'You have behaved generously,' she wrote; 'you know our troubles and difficulties. They have brought us very low. I am in despair about Jack's future. Dear Valentine, you can save him, and I believe you will. Meanwhile you have earned a troubled woman's gratitude.'

Valentine was as good as his word. It was a point of honour with him. He felt a little fondness for Adrian, a little chivalry for Lady Eugenia, a little liking for Jack, a great deal of regard for his own reputation for efficiency. He was bound to succeed, even when success concerned such uninfluential persons as his own relations. He cast the matter over in his mind—he inquired right and left—he kept his eyes open.

Before many weeks the opportunity, which generally comes to the alert observer, presented itself. Among Valentine's City acquaintances were a firm of brewers, who were doing a good solid business in beer and public-houses. Rudge Brothers had an account at one of Valentine's banks, and he had, accordingly, the best information as to their resources, their wants, their prospects. They were shrewd, pushing, ambitious; resolved to make a fortune and on the high road to do so. They turned their capital to excellent account, and saw numerous directions in which more capital might be profitably employed. They were not, it had to be acknowledged, quite gentlemen; but they were in process of becoming gentlemen, and meanwhile were quite near enough the mark for business purposes. They would be tempted by the idea of a prospective baronet and a county connection. They would like an alliance with Valentine. Jack might be turned to some account as a partner, and a few thousand pounds could surely be raised from the collapse of Huntsham for him to take into the concern. Jack was a good fellow, a pleasant

companion, popular in society, an undeniable gentleman—would, no doubt, make an excellent brewer. Valentine broached the subject delicately to the Rudges, and felt his way. His overtures were well received. The additional capital was scarcely a consideration; still a few thousand pounds are always something. But the connection was desirable, and the firm was exactly at the stage when its desirability would be most acutely felt. After some days of negotiation Valentine was able to inform Lady Eugenia that an arrangement, in every way satisfactory, was open to Jack's acceptance, and that, if the disentailing of Huntsham would set £5000 at liberty, Jack might be provided with a pleasant berth in an excellent business, where he might reasonably hope to make, at any rate, an ample competence, and might become a rich man.

Pleased with the success of his diplomacy, Valentine wrote with real good nature and satisfaction at having been able to do the family so good a turn. Lady Eugenia gave a sigh of relief and congratulated herself on a practical achievement.

A ray of light had at last broken through the murky sky under which she generally lived.

CHAPTER XI

LADY HERIOT PREPARES FOR ACTION

'Our acts our angels are, or good or ill,
Our fatal shadows that walk by us still.'

If there was one thing more than another which shook Lady Heriot's confidence in Mr. Graves, it was his persistent championship of Sir Adrian. Even the execution at Huntsham failed to rouse him to any proper pitch of indignation, if indeed Mr. Graves's mood could be reasonably held to deserve so respectable a name as indignation. He was indignant, indeed; not, however, like Lady Heriot, with Sir Adrian, but with those who had so unnecessarily set the machinery of the law in motion to harass him. 'It is too bad of Mortimers' people,' he said; 'a great deal too bad; and too bad of the Huntsford Bank. They knew perfectly well that the money was safe; they knew that I was acting for Sir Adrian, and they never gave me a hint. It is some political grudge, I am convinced. Mortimers, you know, were Mr. Goldingham's agents at the last election. It is too bad, too bad: an honourable high-minded gentleman like Sir Adrian! There is really nothing that men will not do to indulge a political grudge.'

This view of the subject did not much accord with Lady Heriot's present feelings about it; nor did it gratify her to have Sir Adrian's misdeeds so generously extenuated. 'I really cannot see it in that light,' she said; 'people have a right to get their bills paid, I suppose, somehow or other, by fair means or foul——'

'But not by such foul means as this,' said Mr. Graves. 'It was a low manœuvre.'

'You can never see any harm in Adrian, can you, Mr. Graves?' Lady Heriot said, unable to repress a rising feeling of irritation. 'Well, you have not had to pay his bills as often as I have.'

'Sir Adrian has been unwise in some of his speculations, I admit,' said the solicitor; 'unwise perhaps, in speculating at all. All the same, if he had not, I do not see how he could have paid his way. His rental is less than half his father's. He has very heavy charges, bequeathed to him by others; and these, unluckily, do not diminish with his rental. It was natural for him to try to increase his income: it was excusable, it was imperative. Even a wise man is bound sometimes to run a risk.'

'If I ever wished to alter the disposition which I have made of my property,' asked Lady Heriot, breaking away from a distasteful topic, and coming somewhat abruptly to the business which she had at heart, 'how ought it to be done?'

Mr. Graves was startled. Such a change in Lady Heriot's intentions was a contingency which had never till now suggested itself. He had presence of mind, however, to conceal his surprise. 'It could be done by a codicil,' he said, 'like that which your ladyship will remember having executed some years ago, when you altered some of the legacies. But such a change would require a great deal of consideration, would it not?'

'I have given much consideration to it,' said Lady Heriot with decision, 'and am giving it. I am rapidly coming to the conclusion that it may be my duty to save the bulk of the property—such of it as Sir Adrian has not squandered—by leaving it to his brother. I should wish to have a codicil drawn which will effect that, in case I should ever decide upon doing it.'

Mr. Graves stood absolutely aghast. 'Your ladyship will not forget, I am sure,' he said——

'I would rather not discuss it just now,' said Lady Heriot; 'I am not strong enough to-day. I have decided

upon nothing. But I see plainly that it may be right for me to take this course, and I wish to be prepared for it. The legacies may remain as they are; but have the codicil so drawn, if you please, that the rest of the property may go to Valentine instead of his brother. How must it be executed?'

'The formalities of execution are the same as those for a will,' said Mr. Graves, by this time growing decidedly stiffer in manner. 'The codicil must be signed in the presence of two witnesses, both present at the same time; and each of them must sign their attestation in presence of the other. But I shall come myself, of course, and see that everything is right and in due form. Any mistake about a will is often the ruin of a family—the ruin, at any rate, of its happiness. We see such things, unhappily, only too often in my profession.'

'I can well imagine it,' said Lady Heriot, more and more determined not to let Mr. Graves's scruples stand in the way of her intentions, whatever they might be. 'Nevertheless it will be a satisfaction to me to have such a codicil ready and at hand, in case I wish to use it. Will you have it prepared and send it to me?'

Mr. Graves left his old friend with a heavy heart and apprehensive of disaster. Lady Heriot was evidently contemplating some foolish act, and was clearing the field of those who would oppose her folly. She was just at that stage of bodily weakness at which infirmities of temper and judgment are likeliest to reveal themselves; and she was shaking off her advisers. It was not easy to see how she could be helped. So thought Mr. Graves as he walked homeward, in anxious thought immersed, striving in vain to see his way to any hopeful solution.

Lady Heriot felt a quiet exultation in having courageously confronted Mr. Graves. She was, at heart, afraid of him—of his keen insight, his impartiality, his staunch good sense. He had his views—clear and decided—as to what she ought to do, and they clashed with her own inclinations. It was a relief to be now completely mistress of the situation and free to do what she pleased without the troublesome con-

straint of unfavourable criticism. What she meant to do she had not yet decided, except that it should be exactly what she chose, not what other folks bothered her into doing.

It was perhaps Lady Heriot's satisfaction at the achievement that made her especially bright amid her guests that night. She was having a little dinner in honour of Olivia, who was afterwards to make her *début*, under Mrs. Hazelden's protection, in a London ball-room. The occasion was exciting, for the beautiful dress which Lady Heriot had ordered, and which Madame Celestine sent home only just in time for dinner, proved indeed an ambrosial affair. Madame Celestine had recognised her opportunity for a striking effect, and had done her best to deck the beautiful débutante with artistic simplicity. Olivia surprised herself, Mrs. Phillips, who presided on the occasion at her toilette, and Lady Heriot—who criticised the result—by a new access of loveliness. The dress was, all acknowledged, a masterpiece; but how easily are such masterpieces constructed for young creatures like Olivia! Lady Heriot had sent for her to come and be inspected before she went downstairs. Olivia found her resting in an arm-chair, in anticipation of the fatigues of the evening.

'Charming!' she cried, as Olivia came and stood before her.

'It is so good of you,' cried the blushing Olivia, giving her kind patroness a filial kiss. 'My dress is too lovely—I feel a great deal too fine in it.'

But another delightful surprise was still to come. 'I want you,' Lady Heriot said, 'to have a little remembrance of your visit to me. I shall remember it with pleasure. You have worked hard for me, I am sure, and I wish you to feel an old woman's gratitude. Give me the string of pearls, Phillips. Put it on, dear, and go to the glass and see how you like yourself with a necklace.'

When they got downstairs they found that Dr. Crucible had already arrived in charge of a fine bouquet, which, in an unprecedented fit of gallantry, he had ordered from Covent Garden as his contribution to the splendour of the occasion.

Olivia, whose attire till now had been of a rustic and juvenile simplicity, was conscious of feeling extremely overdressed. It was a comfort when Mrs. Valentine arrived in attire whose magnificence completely eclipsed Olivia, and gave her a reassuring sensation of insignificance. After the Valentines came Lord Melrose, and, close upon him, Mrs. Hazelden, who was to be Olivia's guardian through the eventful evening.

'We will not wait for Mr. de Renzi,' Lady Heriot said. 'He has written to say that he may be kept at the House. He has to make a speech this evening, and must get it over before he comes away. He is to come when he can; so, my dear Olivia, you will have to go down to dinner by yourself.'

Stonehouse brought them the latest news from the House; he had come straight from the debate. De Renzi had spoken admirably.

'There had been nothing so brilliant among the younger men this session,' he said; 'I heard Mr. Grandiose congratulating him. He is a real acquisition to his party—to the House.'

In the midst of this panegyric De Renzi arrived, with the flush of triumph full upon him. Olivia felt it very impressive to meet at close quarters one who had just been experiencing a parliamentary success; but De Renzi wore his honours with pleasant modesty. He was quite at his ease, and at once put Olivia at ease by a reassuring air of intimacy. He was the friend of the family, and bent—like the rest of Lady Heriot's friends—on providing Olivia with amusement. She should be well amused. Commonplace, ceremony, tedium, were for the uninteresting world of outsiders. De Renzi was in the highest spirits, and his high spirits were delightfully infectious.

'I am so glad that I managed to get away,' he said, 'though I did not know the honour that Lady Heriot destined for me. We have had such an afternoon, such an awful afternoon, on the Old Swamp Reclamation Bill. It is the Serbonian bog of modern times, where armies whole

have sank—armies of debaters with batteries of blue-books. Thank Heaven it is over. Now we will enjoy ourselves.'

'For me,' said Olivia, 'it is amusement enough to sit next a Member of Parliament who has just been making a speech. You can hardly believe, I suppose, that I have never heard one.'

'No?' said De Renzi. 'Let me advise you never to do so. No one ever quite recovers his spirits again who has been through a debate, the worst known form of human dreariness. You would lose your freshness, which would be such a misfortune.'

'Should I?' said Olivia. 'Well, my freshness, which means my country simplicity, I suppose, must take care of itself. I want to see the world.'

'The world will be delighted to see you, I am sure,' said her companion. 'What bit of it do you propose to look at first?'

'To-night,' answered Olivia, 'I am going to a ball—a very grand ball. Mrs. Hazelden is going to take me.'

'Ah,' said De Renzi. 'Mrs. Beaumont's, of course. That will be an experience. I wish I could be there; but I am bound by the most awful vows to be back at the House by half-past ten. I dare not break them, even for you or Mrs. Beaumont.'

'What a pity!' said Olivia. 'Have you to make another speech?'

'Heaven forbid!' cried De Renzi. 'I have contributed my share of dulness for to-day.'

'Dull!' cried Olivia. 'But how can it be dull? Mr. Stonehouse was saying, when you came in, that your speech had been excessively brilliant.'

'See how people deceive themselves!' cried De Renzi. 'Stonehouse himself is the wreck of an amusing character, the ruins of a wit! Nothing of him remains but an occasional epigram. But how delightful for you to know nothing about it—to be so unsophisticated. Do you know nothing then?'

'Nothing,' said Olivia, 'except Homer and Virgil, which

I have read with my father. And now I have begun Dante.'

'Perfection!' cried her companion—'an ideal education; three masterpieces, and the rest a blank for fancy to play at large in! If only we could all be educated like that! What a world it would be!'

'A dull one!' said Olivia. 'I have found that out already; there are a thousand things that I am dying to know about.'

'A mistake,' said De Renzi, 'as old as our first mother! Be warned by her. Feminine craving for information was the ruin of mankind, and is so still. Ignorance, some philosopher has said, is bliss. How true! If only we could attain it! And so you really can do nothing?'

'Nothing,' said Olivia, 'except play the piano a little, not that it deserves the name of playing. I know enough to know that.'

'You love music, then?' asked her companion.

'I do,' said Olivia, 'with all my heart. It is my chief delight at home. It has been one of my great pleasures in London. Mrs. Hazelden has taken me to several enchanting concerts. But all music delights me. There is a beautiful German band which comes into Seymour Street on Thursdays. Even the barrel organs are an immense pleasure. Do you like them?'

'No,' said De Renzi. 'I am never merry when I hear street music, as somebody or other says in Shakespeare, I believe; but before I became a political star I was beginning a musical education, and devoted myself to the violoncello. But what sort of music do you play?'

'I?' said Olivia. 'Only some slow movements of Beethoven, and some airs of Schubert and Chopin that Lady Heriot likes to fall asleep to.'

'Happy Lady Heriot!' cried De Renzi. 'A narcotic worthy of gods! What blissful slumbers they must be—like Endymion's, "full of sweet dreams and health and quiet breathing," and ended only by a kiss from the moon. That would be the way that one would like to go to sleep,

lulled by the Graces instead of being stupefied by boredom! I am a wretched sleeper. Even in the House I can scarcely get a nap. You must play me to sleep some day, like Lady Heriot; will you?'

'With pleasure,' said Olivia, beaming upon her companion with mirthful eyes: 'You can have the other sofa. I can do both of you at once.'

'That will be delightful,' said De Renzi; 'but I am so interested in your case. It is like that of the charming girl in the "Golden Butterfly," who had been brought up in the proper way, and been kept perfectly ignorant, just as you have been. How delightful it must be not to be able to read or write.'

'But, unfortunately,' said Olivia, 'I *can* read and write. I forgot to mention that. All the little children in the national schools get as far as that.'

'Yes,' said De Renzi, 'and so lose all their poetry! You spoil a peasant when you teach him how to read. How incongruous, how unnatural, how inartistic! What does he want to read for, when he is happy in the fields? Who can tell what he will read? Very likely some horrid revolutionary newspaper.'

'Well,' said Olivia, 'I always read the *Times* to Lady Heriot after breakfast. That is how I came to know about your speeches in Parliament; but I thought the idea was that everybody should be educated.'

'The idea!' cried De Renzi; 'yes, it is one of the radical cries which obliges the Tories to outcry them. That is why we are all going to the dogs on a stream of national enlightenment.'

'What heresy are you propounding, Mr. de Renzi?' said Lady Heriot.

'No heresy, Lady Heriot,' said De Renzi, 'but the orthodox doctrine of contented ignorance. Great men can do without knowledge; petty men only become pettier by being crammed with more than they are meant to hold. Lord Chatham, you remember, knew nothing but Spenser's *Faery Queen*.'

'Which we none of us know nowadays,' said Stone-

house, 'but a prig has been, I think, defined as a person who has been overfed with intellectual provender.'

'That accounts for our all being such prigs,' said Lord Melrose. 'They cram us too much; one of George Eliot's wisest observations is that you only make a man's ignorance denser by starching it with facts.'

'And,' said De Renzi, 'when the starch is made out of parliamentary statistics, how dense does ignorance become!'

When the gentlemen rejoined the ladies in the drawing-room De Renzi dexterously took possession of a chair which secured him a few moments' talk with Olivia. 'It is too tiresome,' he said; 'I am obliged to go. But we shall meet again before long. I am coming to Mrs. Beaumont's after all. I shall get into dire disgrace. You must reward me with a valse.'

CHAPTER XII

AN OLD LADY'S SERMON

'A man, who can
Live to be old, and still a man;
Whose latest and most leaden hours
Fall with soft wings, stuck with soft flowers;
And when life's short fable ends,
Soul and body part as friends;
No quarrels, murmurs, no delay;
A kiss, a sigh,—and so, away.'

THE hours of Olivia's holiday were numbered. Her father had returned from Huntsham, and, in his lonely home, was missing her sorely. Pleasure apart, Olivia's presence at the Rectory was essential to the maintenance of such order as prevailed there. The family accounts would, she knew, in her absence soon become chaotic. Some village festivities needed her inspiring genius and controlling hand. Her father was quite incapable of carrying on his parish work without her aid. Olivia began to detect, or to imagine that she detected, some sub-tones of melancholy in his letters. She knew instinctively that he was wanting her. She confided her suspicions to Lady Heriot, and Lady Heriot, without an instant's hesitation, decided that she ought to go. It was a characteristic of her habitual unselfishness that, when once she learnt how matters stood, she breathed no hint of regret that Olivia's visit could not be prolonged. Yet she would fain have prolonged it. Olivia was daily becoming more necessary to her. She was in need of companionship, and Olivia was excellent company. Her ministrations added greatly to the elder lady's enjoyment. Congeniality is what invalids prize in those who are about

them, and Lady Heriot found Olivia extremely congenial. Her movements, her tones, her way of doing things—her way of talking and feeling about things—all were soothing to the sufferer's nerves. She amused, she interested, she touched her. It was not always that Lady Heriot felt up to having Mrs. Valentine, or even her own daughter, Lydia Hazelden, to stir the tranquillity of her chamber: nor were they always to be had. Both were busy women, in the full flow of life. Mrs. Hazelden had a family of boys and girls, whose souls and bodies left their mother little leisure for any other care. Isabella found the claims of society, each year, more imperative, more absorbing. Olivia could see that Lady Heriot was fatigued by her daughter-in-law's bustle and gossip, and tried in vain to assume an interest in matters which were becoming too remote from her invalid life and her real thoughts, to be any longer interesting. It was natural, of course, that a young woman with Isabella's tastes should enjoy the world and the amusements which fortune brought within her reach. It did not follow that other people should care about them as much as she did, or that Isabella's somewhat noisy chatter should prove a good specific on afternoons when Lady Heriot's spirits were clouded, her head aching, her vital powers sinking low. Mrs. Valentine, too, made no secret to Olivia that she regarded her visit to Lady Heriot in the light of a holiday for herself—a welcome respite from distasteful duties. It was a duty to attend on her mother-in-law, and one which she dared not neglect; but it was a relief to perform it by proxy.

'Nature never intended me for a nurse,' she one day told Olivia. 'I do not feel compassionate to people just because they happen to be old or ill. *They* ought to be compassionate to us who have to attend to them. You are a perfect little adept at it, and have a genius for nursing. You ought to be a sister of mercy, my dear; you would make a charming nun. But for me, I confess to you, an invalid's room is a chamber of horrors! Pouff! It stifles me to think of it. And invalids! How exacting they are! how full of troublesome whims! How can they expect one not

to dislike them? For me, I love what is lovable—light, beauty, pretty colours, pretty forms, pretty faces. I love them. I want as much of them as I can get. But nursing! My dear Olivia, stay as long as ever you can, like a good girl, and earn my eternal gratitude.'

The Fates had decreed, however, that Olivia's visit should end. Lady Heriot had already arranged for her journey home. There was nothing now to be said.

None the less did the approaching departure throw a tinge of melancholy over the intercourse of these two friends. Olivia was grieved to leave a void which she was conscious no one else could fill. Should she ever return to fill it? There was a feeling of everything being for the last time. The end was coming, was near; each week did its work. Even during Olivia's visit Lady Heriot's powers had seemed to ebb. The sands were running out, and running fast. The morning after the ball she was especially feeble. She had slept ill—she was in pain.

'I fear,' she said to Olivia, 'that I must give up having dinner-parties. They are too much for me, even little ones like yesterday's, and with my dear Olivia to help. But now tell me about the ball.'

'It was an immense crowd,' said Olivia; 'a crowd of strangers, which is a strong form of loneliness. But what a splendid sight! The flowers were exquisite, though it seemed sacrilege to put them to perish in a mob. There were many beautiful ladies: it was a pleasure to look at them. Mr. de Renzi came and took me down to supper, and afterwards helped us to get away.'

'And you enjoyed it?' asked Lady Heriot.

'Yes,' said Olivia; 'it was my first experience. It was all new to me—my beautiful new dress, and the lovely pearls among the rest. I have not thanked you for them half enough, Lady Heriot, for this and a thousand other kindnesses. You have been very good to me.'

'Well, Olivia,' said Lady Heriot, 'grieved as I am to lose you, I am glad in some ways that you are going home. You will be safer with your father—safer and happier.'

'I have been very happy here,' said Olivia; 'you have

given me many pleasures. But safe? Can I be safer than with you?'

'Yes,' said her companion; 'more out of harm's way. Your life at home is the proper sort of life to lead—a life of tranquillity, refinement, pure and healthy joys, simple pleasures.'

'But,' said Olivia, 'you have loved society, Lady Heriot, have you not?'

'Yes,' said Lady Heriot; 'well, perhaps too well. I am an old woman now, and see things otherwise than I did when I was a young and foolish one. There is a nice saying of George Sand's that I am fond of. "When we grow old," she says, "and reach the sunset of life—the finest hour for tones and harmonies of colour—we form new ideas of everything, and above all, of affection." Young eyes are so dazzled with the bright things in life that they sometimes fail to see that affection is the only thing really worth caring about.'

'I feel a great affection for you,' said Olivia, 'and I care about yours, next to my father's, more, I believe, than about anything in the world.'

Lady Heriot sat holding Olivia's hand, and looking at her with kindly wistful eyes, as if trying to read her future.

'You are a good girl, Olivia, and have a warm heart, a tender heart, a rare possession nowadays, I can tell you. I am always so afraid that you should get it hurt. Many women have lumps of ice which do duty for hearts. They are dangerous folk for sensitive natures who cross their path. One has to beware of them.'

'You want to say something to me, Lady Heriot, I can see,' said Olivia.

'Yes,' said her companion, 'I do. I have it on my conscience to give you some advice. I feel a great interest in you. I should like to see you happy, dear Olivia, before I die. I should like to protect you from unhappiness. I wish that I could. But, who knows how long I shall be alive? You will be beset with dangers. There are people who ignore all the precious things of life. They try to make young women ignore them; they laugh them to scorn, for they have ceased to believe in them. You may be tried,

you may be tempted. Olivia, take an old friend's advice—one who has seen life and knows the world—and don't let them persuade you; don't let them deceive you. Numbers of girls are sold that way; be not you of that unhappy number. They will try to sell you. There will be plenty of bidders. Some one will want to buy your sweet eyes. Isabella will put them up to the biggest bidder. Do not be bought at any price. Marry the man you love, and, till he comes—and he will come in all due time—turn a deaf ear to all that others say, to all that others can offer. The worst way of preparing for the journey of life; believe me, is to link yourself to a companion whom you are not certain of loving.'

'I hope that I may never do that,' said Olivia. 'Why should you think it likely, Lady Heriot?'

'You will be tempted, Olivia; I am positive of it. You have the art to charm, my child, the dangerous, sometimes the fatal art. You cannot help yourself. You will be admired; you will be flattered, and flattery is a most intoxicating drink for young heads, and indeed for old ones. You will be beset by those who are thinking only—who can think only—for themselves, who have much to offer, who will bid high with money, influence, prestige, all the good things of life. How is a poor young creature to know the real worth of those who want her to embellish their world, who want to buy her? It must be no question of buying, my dear. Some good man will come and offer you his heart and claim yours in return, and then you will be a happy woman.'

Olivia got up and kissed Lady Heriot's forehead.

'Forgive me for preaching you a sermon,' Lady Heriot went on, 'I may not have an opportunity of preaching you another. Young people, whom I love, starting in their fragile skiffs on a perilous sea, fill me with a sort of anxious terror. Shipwreck is so easy—your precious freight so soon tossed overboard in despair. And what that means to feeling souls!'

'The world seems a dangerous place,' said Olivia. 'I like looking at it in safety from your drawing-room windows

or my father's study. I am sure at any rate that I love him and I love you. At present I am safe.'

But was she safe? or was she carrying with her to her quiet home the germ of that which would one day stir her being to its lowest depths, and shake the fair fabric of her life's happiness with mortal shock?

It was unfortunate that, next day, when De Renzi called, Lady Heriot was not well enough to be at home. Olivia felt it a sort of blank to have missed his visit. It would, she confessed to herself, be a great mortification if the Fates had decreed that she should leave London without seeing her brilliant companion once again.

CHAPTER XIII

A YOUNG MAN'S SPORT

'He understood the worth of womankind,
To furnish men, provisionally, sport—
Sport transitive;—such earth's amusements are;
But, seeing that amusements pall by use,
Variety therein is requisite;
And, since the serious work of life were wronged,
Should we bestow importance on our play,
It follows, in such womankind-pursuit,
Cheating is lawful chase.'

THE Fates, however, were not in the habit of decreeing what De Renzi did not like. Next day there came a polite note from him to Lady Heriot, announcing that he had a box at the opera, and would be highly honoured if Miss Hillyard and Mrs. Valentine Heriot would occupy it, and come, on their way home, to a little supper at his house. The Backhouses were to be there, and Dr. Crucible. Mrs. Valentine had already accepted. It remained only for Lady Heriot and Olivia to give their consent. For once Lady Heriot looked, Olivia could perceive, disconcerted at a proposal for her amusement. She was, in truth, beginning to feel alarmed for her *protégée's* safety. She had preached her sermon, but on what heedless ears do such sermons fall! A danger which Lady Heriot, in proposing Olivia's visit, had never reckoned as within the realm of possibility, was beginning to shape itself with disagreeable distinctness. It was the danger of De Renzi. The chances were a million to one against De Renzi and Olivia forming any but the most superficial acquaintance. They were whole hemi-

spheres apart in tastes, habits, ways of thought. They belonged to worlds as different as though Olivia had dropped from another planet. They might—they would, if they met—amuse each other by complete diversity of nature and circumstance, by force of contrast, by the remoteness of each other's ideas. And they might do so with safety. Anything beyond amusement was inconceivable.

So Lady Heriot, on prudent thoughts intent, had ordained. So, according to every rule of probability, events should have fallen out. Nothing, however, where human beings are concerned, is so likely as the improbable, the inconceivable. De Renzi falsified every calculation. His predilection for Olivia was unmistakable. At Lady Heriot's dinner-party he had devoted himself to amusing her; he had made his way to her for a *tête-à-tête* in the drawing-room: he had avowedly deserted the House for her sake, and, contrary to all his habits, had made his appearance at a ball. Those flattering attentions could not, of course, have been without their effect on an impressible girl. Olivia, Lady Heriot could see, was impressed; how much, how little, none could tell; but more, it was to be feared, than was desirable for her peace of mind. Her reticence about De Renzi—the guarded language in which she spoke about him, when contrasted with the usual frankness of her utterances—implied that there was something that she cared not to avow. The suspicion was alarming. Lady Heriot reproached herself for having allowed the opportunity of their acquaintance. But how vain is such self-reproach, when the mischief is, perhaps, already done!

Nor was De Renzi the only danger. The conviction had begun to be borne in on Lady Heriot that Mrs. Valentine had designs upon Olivia. Either she wanted to annex her for her own purposes, or she was desirous of turning De Renzi's partiality to serious account. Either alternative was alarming. To what risks, in such a woman's hands, was not Olivia's happiness exposed!

Thus De Renzi's invitation was anything but welcome. None the less it could not well be escaped. Mrs. Valentine

had set her heart upon it, and would not be foiled. Lady Heriot was in the feeble condition to which the prospect of a conflict of wills is terrible. Besides, opposition would attract attention, and only emphasise matters which it was, above everything, desirable to leave in obscurity.

Lady Heriot felt the situation to be full of anxiety. It was a comfort to reflect that the period of peril was nearly at its close. In another week Olivia would be beyond the reach both of De Renzi's and Mrs. Valentine's dangerous influences—safe once again in the quiet of her father's house. If only she could read Olivia's thoughts and assure herself that no harm had as yet been effected!

Meanwhile, how did matters stand with Olivia? How do matters stand with a young girl when she first discovers that she wields a spell which stronger natures than her own obey—which makes her a force among her fellow-mortals —when she knows that she is no longer insignificant—when it dawns upon her that some one admires her, delights in her, finds in her something more charming than in others?

It was, Olivia felt, a disturbing revelation. A new world had suddenly opened upon her, full of exciting possibilities. She felt powerless to resist De Renzi, but not powerless to charm him. He had, again and again, obliged her to recognise this soul-stirring fact. Their talk at the ball, short as it had been, was long enough for this. He was there for her. And he was very impressive. Never before had Olivia met any one so brilliant, so audacious, so much the incarnation of success. He seemed to go through life in a sort of triumph, treading on roses and dewy meads, on the prostrate forms of fallen foes, with light, joyous, indifferent step. Some men are born to good fortune. Some are born hewers of wood and drawers of water—the useful, patient, unaspiring toilers of existence. Nature, it may be hoped, adapts them to their lot. A favoured few are born to ride on the toilers' shoulders, to coin pleasure, amusement, distinction out of their obscure labours. De Renzi took it for granted that he was one of these—foremost among the lucky ones. For him riches, pleasure, delights of eye and ear and taste, the rapture of gratified ambition, the joy of

successful achievement. This spoilt child of fortune it was who was now owning Olivia's spell, consulting her every wish, devising pretexts to meet her, inviting her to consider him at her disposal—the eager ministrant to her enjoyment. The idea was bewildering. Bewildering, too, was De Renzi's little banquet. Olivia had never seen luxury before—had never, certainly, seen so many beautiful things as crowded upon her sight in De Renzi's drawing-room. Old Lady Heriot would have been scandalised at its profusion; but De Renzi's profusion was at any rate judicious and refined. The books, the pictures, the etchings, the curiosities—if too abundant for some tastes—were all of the rarest. Flowers, fresh and exquisite, filled every available space. An open piano proclaimed that music had here some recent devotee. Mrs. Backhouse flitted from one pretty object to another with fresh exclamations of delight.

'Sybarite!' she cried, as De Renzi followed her about doing the honours of the occasion and the place, 'this then is how a bachelor makes shift to live.'

'Bachelors,' said De Renzi, 'can hardly be said to live. They hope for life. To-night, for a brief moment, my hopes are realised.'

The party was a small one. Dr. Crucible had been invited as a friend of Olivia, and was now deep with Mr. Cosmo over a rare copy of Boccaccio, one of the last of De Renzi's acquisitions. 'You will like to know Cosmo,' De Renzi had said to Olivia, 'one of the greatest connoisseurs in Europe, and a famous collector. We will make him show us his cabinets some day. Meantime he is a curiosity himself. Ah, there is supper! Come, Mrs. Heriot, let us lead the way.'

Cosmo came up and took charge of Olivia, and placed her next their host. Mrs. Backhouse followed with Dr. Crucible. Her husband, Valentine Heriot, and one or two more men brought up the procession.

De Renzi was in the highest spirits, and played his part of host with animation. 'I hope that everybody is hungry,' he cried. 'The opera always makes me ravenous.'

'For my part,' said Mrs. Backhouse, 'I am far too

overwrought to be hungry. I don't think I shall go to "Faust" again; it distresses one. Marguerite haunts me. The jewel scene is a sort of sermon against vanity, and I am conscious of being disgracefully vain. I believe I should sell my soul for a pretty necklace if I had the chance.'

'Fortunately,' said De Renzi, 'there is no need for any such transaction. Backhouse keeps you too well supplied. Your sapphires to-night would justify any crime.'

'And how nice,' said Mrs. Backhouse, 'to have them for nothing.'

'For nothing!' cried her husband; 'I like that.'

'A husband's homage counts for nothing,' said Cosmo.

'But what a *recherché* supper!' cried Mrs. Backhouse, studying the menu. 'Half a dozen delectable curiosities of which I never heard. It will enrich my imagination and my cook's. I am devoted to fine cooking. It is an art we women have to study. Husbands must be fed. Mine is dreadfully particular.'

'Of course,' said Cosmo. 'A woman's sovereignty begins in the kitchen, and to be complete it must be intelligent. To govern the man you must feed him scientifically.'

'But it would never do to feed one's husband with such suppers as this too often, would it?' asked Mrs. Backhouse. 'Nor do I like the idea of feeding men with a purpose. It sounds as if they were a sort of wild beasts.'

'But what submissive ones!' said Cosmo. 'Man is ahead of the other animals because he got tamed the first —by woman. Beauty, we read in Pope, "draws as with a single hair."'

'It depends upon whose hair it is,' said Mrs. Heriot, 'and which way it wants to draw one. Some women are empresses everywhere but in their own homes.'

'But then some husbands are so unsympathetic,' said Mrs. Backhouse with a sweet smile, 'and so unimpressible! One cannot think how they persuaded their wives to marry them.'

I have read,' said Crucible, 'that women's faculty for making incongruous marriages is the corner-stone of civilisation. It preserves the social equilibrium.'

'I suppose,' said Mrs. Backhouse, 'that it is a law of nature, isn't it? But the laws of nature are so often bad ones. This is one of the worst, so far as women are concerned. It involves so much suffering. Just think what dull men girls marry!'

'But woman does not mind dulness,' said Cosmo, 'or any other form of martyrdom. In the East she submits to be locked up in a seraglio; in the West she unflinchingly obliterates herself in a bore.'

'Not unflinchingly,' said Mrs. Valentine; 'we have to make the best of an inferior sex. Bad is the best.'

'It is a beautiful provision,' said Crucible, 'to prevent society from becoming too brilliant. It is like the dark, defunct companion star, which occasionally obscures the splendid ones, like Sirius and Algol. They are the brightest of known creations, but some cold piece of opacity revolves about them, now diminishing their brilliancy, now shutting them off altogether from human ken. The husband's function is to eclipse the effulgence of the wife.'

'The occultation of Venus!' observed Cosmo; 'a curious phenomenon, with, no doubt, some useful purpose, if we only knew it.'

'How interesting,' cried Mrs. Backhouse. 'How delightful it must be to be scientific, like Dr. Crucible, and to explain human nature by the heavenly bodies! Do you know that I never heard of Algol and its attendant star before. For the future, when I am not shining in society, I shall know the cause.'

'Nothing,' said Cosmo, 'could eclipse Mrs. Backhouse, not even a husband.'

CHAPTER XIV

RETRO SATHANAS!

'The sun of youth
Has shone too straight upon his track, I know,
And fevered him with dreams of doing good
To good-for-nothing people.'

WHEN Lady Eugenia received Valentine's accommodating proposal it might have been thought that her anxieties about Jack's future were at an end. In the case of most women this would have been so: but then most women have not such a husband as Sir Adrian, or such a son as Jack to reckon with. Sir Adrian had to be encountered first. Lady Eugenia looked forward to the interview with some flutterings of heart. He would, she knew only too well, raise every conceivable objection, and some objections that were inconceivable. And so it proved. Sir Adrian was much aggrieved at negotiations having been opened with Valentine—his offending brother—without his sanction.

'But you never would have sanctioned it, Adrian,' pleaded his wife, 'if you had known.'

'That is just it,' said Sir Adrian; 'and now Valentine will, of course, imagine that I was too proud to ask a favour of him myself, but not too proud to let you do it for me, which is what I call mean. It is excessively annoying.'

'Please do not say that,' said his wife; 'unless you want to hurt me. We have quite troubles enough without your doing that. You know that Valentine will imagine

nothing of the sort. He knows you too well. At any rate you must admit that the result is satisfactory.'

'I am not so sure of that,' said Sir Adrian. 'What do we know about this precious brewery, and the men who are to be Jack's partners. No doubt they own a lot of public-houses and gin-palaces. It is not the sort of thing which I fancy for my son. It will take a good deal to convince me that I ought to consent, if I ever do. After all, my consent is but half the battle, and the smaller half. I have a shrewd suspicion of what Jack will think about it. If he does not like it, my views about it will not signify. I will never urge him.'

'I cannot conceive why he should object,' said Lady Eugenia, 'and I cannot think that he will.'

'Well,' said Sir Adrian, 'try him.'

Try him Lady Eugenia did, with results that far more than confirmed her husband's prognostications. Jack met his uncle's proposal with an uncompromising opposition, which his mother knew by long experience that it was in vain to combat. Lady Eugenia in her desperation betrayed more temper than Jack had ever seen in her before. She told him what trouble she had taken, what a stoop her pride had made, in order to secure him this good start in life. She was full of dismal apprehensions about their concerns, and especially about Jack's future. No doubt the plan was in some ways a descent, but everybody nowadays has to descend.

Then Jack, usually so dutiful and loving, and the pink of courtesy, flew out in a manner which his mother felt to be hardly short of brutal. 'I do not care about Uncle Val,' he said, 'or the people he consorts with. They are a bad lot, mother; I met a party of them at his house when I was in London, and was ashamed to see him, yes, and Aunt Isabella too, making up to them, beaming upon them, flattering them, actually flirting with them! Besides, no power upon earth would ever induce me to have anything to do with public-houses. I know too much about them. Go into partnership with a brewer! Go into partnership with the devil. Ask any

parson, any magistrate, any policeman, where all the sin and misery of England are hatched—the starving wives and children, the ruined homes, the workhouses, the jails. It is the publican's work, and the publican is the agent of the brewer! Parson, schoolmaster, and philanthropist struggle in vain to help the poor man while at every street corner there is temptation flaunted in his face to lure him to ruin. Come round the Shoreditch public-houses with me on a Saturday night and then ask me to earn a livelihood out of them if you can!'

'My dear Jack,' said his father, who came into the room during this tirade and listened to it with some secret satisfaction; 'what would you have? The Englishman must have his liquor, must he not? and liberty to drink it? The brewer cannot stop him any more than you or I can—any more than I can stop the farmers boozing at the "Heriot Arms" in Huntsford.'

'The Englishman and his liberty!' cried Jack; 'the world is tired of them! Liberty means something else than the right of knaves and ruffians to go to the bad whichever road they please, and take their luckless wives and children with them! Such people's liberty is their greatest curse.'

'You cannot force men into virtue,' said Sir Adrian.

'No,' said Jack, 'but one need not tempt them into vice. One may help them towards good. Many men are trying. I wish to help them. At any rate I will not be found in the enemy's camp. Why cant about it? A flourishing brewery with its list of "tied" public-houses (how many have Rudge Brothers, I wonder?) is the best contrived machine for the demoralisation of society the world has ever seen.'

'Well,' said Lady Eugenia, who sat trembling for the fate of her project; 'I cannot see why, because bad people drink too much beer, good people may not drink it, and good people brew it. Some great brewers have been eminent for goodness.'

'Ah!' said Jack doggedly, 'but I have no wish to share their eminence. I am content with obscurity.'

'You will have to be content with something worse than

obscurity,' said his mother, holding desperately to her position. 'How in the world are you to live if you refuse such an opening as this for a fantastic scruple. Surely what your uncle recommends and your father approves cannot be too bad for you to accept.'

'I never said that I approved,' said Sir Adrian. 'I said that Jack must do as he thought right.'

Lady Eugenia's last hope expired. It was cruel of her husband to turn against her. One other bolt remained. She now fired it.

'How are you ever to marry if you will not take your chances when they come? With this business of your uncle's you might have married when you pleased.'

Then Jack, whose wrath had been gathering, flew out in vehement outspokenness.

'You want to bribe me with Olivia, mother. That comes of my confession to you. I cannot change. I love her. I can love no other but her. I will marry no one if I cannot marry her. But I will not buy the chance of that by an act which I should loathe, which would make me despise myself for ever. I have done all that my father wished me. I have given up the woman I love. We do not know how I am to live. Well, I will take my chance: but live a life of shame I will not. Uncle Val's public-houses are declined with thanks! I am right, am I not, father?'

'I said that you must do as you thought right,' said Sir Adrian; 'and so you shall. But remember, Jack, your promise to me about Olivia is more necessary now than ever.'

'There is no need to remind me of that, sir,' Jack said with some impatience; 'I remember it only too well.'

CHAPTER XV

'A NEW MISTRESS NOW I CHASE'

'Every gate is thronged with suitors, all the markets overflow:
I have but an angry fancy; what is that which I should do?'

JACK'S rejection of the career suggested for him by his uncle was but one step, and an unsatisfactory one, towards solving the problem of what was to become of him. That question—ignore it as the Huntsham party might—recurred with disagreeable insistency. He was now of age, and the first use he had made of his majority had been to surrender home, fortune, and the pleasant prospects of a country gentleman's life.

His father had shown him the necessity: that, unhappily, required but little demonstration. It was impossible for Sir Adrian, with an ever diminishing income, to meet the charges of a heavily encumbered estate. Sir Adrian's efforts to improve matters had only enhanced the impossibility. Jack was generosity itself, and would not for a moment, even in thought, have attributed any part of their misfortunes to his father's ill judgment. It was a natural topic of consolation that he was falling with his order. All country gentlemen were impoverished. Jack knew of some others besides his father who were practically insolvent. Poverty had become respectable. None the less, it was extremely depressing to be continually contemplating it, discussing it, and adjusting the comfortable routine of life to its requirements.

Expenditure at Huntsham had been cut down to starvation point.

The shooting had been let, and Jack actually could not stroll with his dog through his own father's woods. The stables, where Lady Eugenia's ponies and a single carriage-horse were all that remained of the once plentiful equipage, filled Jack's soul with the blackest melancholy. Few things are to the horse-lover more depressing than an unused stable—silence and gloom where once all was pleasant bustle; the grass-grown yard, the empty stalls where gallant steeds have stood; the loose-box where the favourite hunter has reposed in well-earned dignity after the labours of the chase, or a pet pony has awaited his morning treat of carrots and lumps of sugar. There were many such stalls now in the Huntsham stables, and Jack, poor lad, had indulged in many a day-dream of how, some day or other, he would fill them worthily with steeds who should carry him as a Heriot M. F. H. ought, in the proper order of things, to be carried. Vain dreams! Vain hopes, which the rude hand of reality had swept away.

Jack shunned the scene of desolation.

Indoors the dingy process of retrenchment was equally apparent. The long file of serving men and women who used to come, trooping, in imposing procession, into the hall for morning prayers, had dwindled to a little group—servants who were necessary to Lady Eugenia's comfort, or who had grown gray in Sir Adrian's service, and could not now, without actual cruelty, be turned out upon the world. Jack used to sit at prayers, looking out on the acres which were passing away from him—the lawn, each corner of it with its own special association—the dear old trees that he had played under as a child—and groaned inwardly at the thought that all was, so far as he was concerned, a vanishing phantom. They were solid facts no more; they were a reminiscence, a regret. 'Fuimus,' he would say bitterly to himself, 'the Heriots have had their day. I am the last of them.'

Meanwhile his father and mother were feeling hopelessly perplexed. They agreed that nothing could be worse for Jack than dawdling about at home, nursing his fancies and his mishaps, practising upon his violin, writing small pieces

of poetry, sketching in the park, or paying visits at neighbouring houses, where he was extremely popular. The revelation of his real position had been a great shock to him, no doubt, which might well make action for the moment impossible. But it was now necessary that Jack should set to work. He himself was anxious to be gone. His parents shared his anxiety, with the super-added motive of wishing him to be well away before Olivia returned to her home, to give rise, perhaps, to some new complication. It was easy enough to see that Jack ought to go. The difficulty was to settle the 'where' and the 'how.' Upon these points the family consultations threw no ray of light. Jack took a humble view of his capacities, and suggested a ranche in Montana where one of his college friends had been for a year or two horse-breaking and cattle-driving. 'That is the only sort of work I am fit for, father, and which I could do decently well; I should like it, I fancy.' The prospect filled Lady Eugenia with horror. She pictured to herself a hideous vision of Jack as a cowboy, careering about on a buck-jumping mustang, swearing strange oaths and bearded like the pard. Sir Adrian liked the project scarcely better than did his wife. It was bad enough for Huntsham to pass to other hands, for their old life to be broken up, but Jack in the wilds of West America, far from kith and kin, living the rowdy life of a cattle-ranche. It did not, Sir Adrian admitted, fall within the limits of the endurable.

Lady Eugenia settled the matter by imploring Jack, with tears in her eyes, not to desert her. 'I have gone through a great deal,' she said, 'but this would be more than I could bear. Your father and I are old people. Do not darken the few years that remain to us by leaving us alone. Jack dear, I beg and pray you not to leave me.'

Jack kissed his mother, and swore that he never would, and told his father that evening that the Montana project might be considered as abandoned. The next day he came down to breakfast with a new suggestion. He would go to London and study art. He knew an artist, Brandon, an

old college friend, who was doing capitally, and would let him share his studio. 'I have a taste for water-colours, as you have often said, mother; I could learn to paint as well as some of the fellows who exhibit. Why should I not? At all events,, it could do no harm to try. I have given up Montana to please you, mother; now you must back up this plan to please me.'

Lady Eugenia found it difficult to meet this argument; and, indeed, on several accounts the project pleased her. It committed them to nothing; it put an end to all schemes which involved Jack's expatriation; it involved no outlay of capital; it would give Jack the sort of life he liked, and an honourable occupation. All hesitation, however, was brought to a speedy close by a letter which arrived from Mr. Hillyard, announcing that Olivia had actually arrived at the Rectory.

Jack was agreeably surprised at the alacrity with which his father embraced his latest scheme. Before the week was over he was established in Brandon's quarters in Chelsea, had enrolled himself in an art class, purchased a magnificent supply of artist's paraphernalia, and, under his friend's superintendence, had set to work with real enthusiasm at the first stage of his new profession.

His presence in London was highly unwelcome to the Valentines. His uncle had been thoroughly annoyed by the summary rejection of his offer. A general feeling of contempt had ripened into active dislike. Valentine, had made up his mind that Jack was a fool—quixotic, romantic, erratic, faddish—everything that a reasonable being, who means to get on in the world, ought not to be. He let Jack at once understand the low valuation which he put upon him and his opinions. Jack saw that his uncle was intending to belittle him, and at once stood to his arms. Valentine dropped a sneer at Sir Adrian which called the colour to Jack's cheeks and set his pulse throbbing. His rejoinder was more explicit than polite. Jack being in a quarrelsome mood, his uncle was by no means disinclined to quarrel. Isabella added the necessary drop of acid. The two men parted coldly, and with no invita-

tion, as Jack had expected, to exercise the privileges of a kinsman in coming when he pleased to see them.

Mrs. Valentine had, just now, a special reason for disliking him. He was in her way; he might prove a formidable obstacle. If he established a footing at his grandmother's he would be likely to spoil everything. It was essential, Isabella Heriot felt, that no other influence than her own should be brought to bear, just now, on the invalid's mind. It was essential that there should be no independent observer, no independent reporter of what was going on. Sir Adrian had no idea of his mother's condition. It was necessary to keep Jack also in the dark, to keep him from Lady Heriot, who had doted on him as a child, as she had doted on his father before him, who, however angry she might at times feel with Sir Adrian, was always hankering after him and longing for reconciliation, —who might easily be reconciled, and so spoil all Mrs. Valentine's designs. It had become necessary to prejudice Lady Heriot against her grandson; nor had this been difficult to achieve. For Lady Heriot had heard much about Jack of which she vehemently disapproved. It was easy to turn this prejudice to good account.

Before he had been many weeks in London Jack had managed so to play his game as to lead up to his adversary's strongest card. He had speedily renewed his intercourse with the Shoreditch parson, who was only too grateful for an enthusiastic co-operator. Jack brought new fire, new zeal, new hope to his companion's projects of reformation. Day after day he was horrified by discoveries of misery—hopeless toil, destitute homes, abysmal depths of depravity—the hell upon earth which is realised in the low life of great cities. He was horrified, perturbed, and excited more than he was aware. He made friends with many men as excited as himself. He attended meetings where everything helped to foster excitement, where passion was in the air, where inflammatory speeches—instinct with anger, impatience, jealousy, revenge—stirred a sympathetic audience almost past quiet endurance; where the view of the rich as the oppressors of the poor, as thoughtless unpitying

monopolists of all the good things of life, was assumed, as a matter of course, by speakers and hearers alike. He heard passionate men declaiming against wrongs inflicted by the powerful on the weak—laws passed by the wealthy to enhance their unjust privileges—order, the mere systematising of oppression—religion, no longer the refuge of the wretched, but the bulwark of inhuman inequalities of lot. He lived among men who were profoundly convinced that a society, contrived in the interests of the privileged few, must be shaken to its very foundations before the poor could enjoy their natural rights. He began to share their beliefs and their aspirations.

Then came a period of distress. Trade was slack; several great industries were paralysed; large numbers were out of work. There were gatherings of hungry men, stung by cruel scenes of misery at home. Jack was in the midst, as excited as any one. He found himself surrounded by numbers of poor people whose inarticulate misery craved bitterly for expression. None of his relations sympathised in the least with him, or could understand his feelings. He thought of his quiet comfortable home, where the distant murmur of the City mob sounded so faintly; of his father's calm explanations; of Hillyard's apologies; his mother's narrow sympathies, foolish fears and equally foolish courage; of his uncle's keen, hard selfishness, always ready to turn each new circumstance to his own profit; of Isabella Heriot, luxurious, pleasure-seeking, profuse in personal expenditure, niggardly in all other.

He thought of them bitterly, contemptuously. Were these the people who constituted society? and if so, was society worth the trouble of preserving it? Then, as bad luck would have it, there was a collision with authority. Jack one day found himself in the midst of a great open-air meeting, which the law forbade. The law forbid it! The law forbid starving men—with wives and children starving at home—if indeed their dens could be called a home—to meet and tell their tale of woe, hopelessness, unrequited toil, bootless search for work! The law maintain order, so that the rich might go on in cynical enjoyment of their

luxuries, while the masses, driven back by main force, toiled, suffered, perished without a helper, without even an utterance of despair! There was a scuffle close to where Jack was standing, a sudden rush of policemen who were pushing their way through the mob and using fists and truncheons freely. The people were shoving, pushing, kicking, shouting. 'Move on! move on!' The truncheons seemed descending everywhere on the shoulders and heads of defenceless people. 'Move on be damned!' cried a tatterdemalion lad who stood at Jack's side, the very embodiment of misery. Crash came a truncheon, the boy was lying at Jack's feet in a pool of blood. 'You ruffian,' cried Jack, beside himself with fury, 'don't touch that boy again.'

'Stand off!' cried the policeman, but Jack was in no temper to stand off, and stood defiant over the prostrate victim of the law. Then some one struck the policeman; a free fight began. Jack unluckily knew how to use his fists, and fought like a young Trojan. 'Stand back!' the policeman cried, pushing Jack roughly back. Then Jack's stalwart arm flashed out and the mob shouted with triumph to see the vindicator of order knocked head over heels and rolling in the dirt. Short-lived triumph, alas! for the prostrate warrior was soon on his legs again. Other policemen were closing in. Jack suddenly felt a crushing blow, given by an unseen hand, which brought him to his knees, sick, giddy, almost stunned. Before he could collect his senses he found himself powerless, with his arms fastened behind him, in the firm grip of two sturdy constables, who were marching him through the frightened, surly crowd to the nearest Station, where he was left for the rest of the day to reflect at leisure on the results of his first active attempt to assist the democracy.

The next morning, with a black eye, torn clothes, and broken head, Jack appeared among a grimy crowd of fellow-offenders, and received the righteous reward of his indiscreet valour in an award of a week's imprisonment, accompanied by several caustic observations from the presiding magistrate as to the foolish criminality of young

gentlemen who amuse themselves by attending mob-meetings and assist in resisting the police.

Mrs. Heriot, when she came down to breakfast next morning, found her husband in no pleasant mood, reading the *Times*, with many fervent exclamations of anger and disgust. He handed the paper to her with sundry half-smothered utterances, more fervent than polite, and strode about the room in a fury.

'The young idiot might have had the decency to conceal his name, and not disgrace us all by his blackguardism and folly. It is intolerable.'

'It is admirable,' cried Mrs. Heriot as she finished the perusal and proceeded to make tea; 'I am delighted!'

'Delighted?' cried her husband. 'And why, pray?'

'Why?' said his wife, 'because I like to see ragamuffins and ragamuffins' champions in their proper place.'

This, however, was not the real cause of Mrs. Valentine's delight. Immediately after breakfast she hurried off to Lady Heriot's with the agreeable intelligence that her grandson was in jail.

Mrs. Valentine, in her eagerness to tell her tale, forgot for the moment the necessity, urged so strongly by Mr. Battiscombe, the doctor, of keeping the invalid from sudden shock. She forgot to watch the effect of her communication on its recipient. Lady Heriot, however, showed no outward symptom of excitement. As Isabella's description drew to a close she sat quietly looking at her with a puzzled inquiring look, as if no clear impression had reached the brain. She closed her eyes and sank back with a gesture of weariness. The rumours of life were beginning to sound faintly in her ear, like the dull murmur of waves upon a distant shore. The clouds were gathering around; all was confusion in her mind. She heard the story indeed, but heard as in a dream, where nothing is consequential. She was too feeble to be indignant, to understand the grounds of indignation. Mrs. Valentine saw quickly that her mother-in-law was not herself. How much of the story had she understood? How much was it possible to make her understand? Had the opportunity

for which Isabella had been so long watching, preparing, already passed away?

When Lady Heriot at last spoke it was clear that her brain was no longer duly performing its task. She had understood nothing aright. In particular she was, as Isabella found, mixing up Jack's present trouble with his father's previous misadventure.

'In jail,' she said, 'Adrian in jail! I was afraid that it would be so, that it would come to this. It was in vain to help him. I did what I could—more than I ought. It was in vain, in vain! And now he is in jail! I am tired, tired! Isabella, are you there?'

'Mother,' said the other, 'you are over-done; keep quiet awhile and rest yourself. There is nothing to worry about. It is not Adrian who is in trouble, but his boy, Jack; it is only a boy's scrape.'

'Where is Adrian?' cried Lady Heriot. 'Why does he not come to see me? Why does he not write? He always used to write to me on Sundays. He knows how ill I am. I am dying, Isabella, dying fast. I want to see him again—to see him again, my poor boy Adrian. You wrote, Isabella, did you not?'

'Of course,' said Mrs. Valentine. 'I wrote the day you told me to do so.'

'Well,' said the other, 'write again and tell him that I am grieved. He does not write or come to me because he is ashamed. I am ashamed too; but tell him to come. I want him badly. I must see him again.'

It was true that Mrs. Valentine had written as she said. None the less, her answer to her mother was a lie. Her letter to Sir Adrian had been carefully framed so as to avoid giving him any intimation of his mother's state or of her wish to see him. On the contrary, it contained various hints which Sir Adrian felt to be excessively offensive. It was written from his mother's room; it professed to be by her inspiration; but it sounded no note of tenderness, affection—the mother's natural yearnings for her first-born. It dealt with some business matters—drily, harshly, even, as it seemed to Sir Adrian's sensitive nerves, discourteously. It

suggested no overtures of peace; rather, it breathed a subtle undertone of hostility. Mrs. Valentine's conscience, which was never encouraged to morbid delicacy or inconvenient outspokenness, had stung her as she wrote. It was necessary, however, at any cost, to keep Sir Adrian away. It was essential to Mrs. Valentine's project. As, moreover, a visit from Sir Adrian just now might really do his mother harm, it was but carrying out the doctor's orders to guard effectually against his coming.

One base act involves another. Lady Heriot's messages to her son being falsified, it was necessary that his letters to her should be suppressed, and that the suppression should be covered by a direct falsehood. Such falsehoods are often told to invalids, whom it is necessary, for their own sakes, to mislead. If justified on this ground, the fact that they are, on other grounds, expedient, cannot render them unjustifiable. So whispered the impish spirit that sat just now, toad-like, whispering evil counsels into Mrs. Valentine's too attentive ear, and suffusing her soul with ever blackening shades of turpitude. Wrongdoing is like some mountain's icy glissade; he who is rash enough to venture on it may have to travel farther than he likes. Mrs. Valentine was on the slope; achievement by whatever means was indispensable. She now took the precaution of giving orders that, should Sir Adrian or his son happen to call, neither of them was, on any account, to be admitted. Nothing was to be said of Lady Heriot's condition except that she had given orders not to be disturbed.

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CHAPTER XVI

A MINISTERING ANGEL

'Look like the innocent flower,
But be the serpent under it.'

MRS. VALENTINE HERIOT had soon to test by practical experience the disagreeableness of nursing and the painful self-sacrifice which attendance on the old and infirm involves. Lady Heriot became rapidly worse. A crisis was impending. It became clear to Mrs. Heriot that if a certain project which she had at heart was ever to be achieved it must be now. The hour for action had arrived: it had arrived, and might soon be gone, for Lady Heriot was sinking fast. Day by day her daughter-in-law could perceive the waning powers of mind and body. She had less strength, less grasp of thought, less capacity for business; she was becoming more the victim of her infirmities; her judgment was clouded; her temper uncertain; her will, now eagerly self-assertive, now fitfully indifferent or submissive. She was exactly in the condition upon which those who surrounded her might work with most effect; but the hour was at hand when it would be impossible to work at all. A practical instinct taught Isabella Heriot the wisdom of making hay while the sun shines. It was shining now, but for how long?

Fortune favoured Mrs. Heriot's resolution to make the best of her opportunities, for she was practically mistress of the situation. Sir Adrian, much wounded by his mother's behaviour to him in his money troubles, had been further aggrieved by her declining his invitation to pay her accus-

tomed summer visit to Huntsham. He was little likely to present himself in Seymour Street. Mrs. Hazelden, who had two sick children on her hands, had taken them to the seaside, and was too fully occupied with nursing to be able to get away to attend on her mother. Jack was exiled from Seymour Street. So the field was clear.

It had always hitherto been Lady Heriot's custom to invite Sir Adrian and Lady Eugenia to visit her during the London season. This visit was a great event to them; it enabled them to be with their mother, to have a taste of London life, to see their friends, and to enliven the monotony of Huntsham existence by a glimpse of society. This year Lady Heriot had not felt well enough to have guests in the house, even such privileged guests as her son and his wife. The doctor was strongly against any sort of worry or excitement. Lady Heriot had easily yielded to Isabella's offer to write on her behalf to Lady Eugenia and explain the necessity of foregoing their usual visit. It is difficult to convey such an explanation graciously, and Mrs. Valentine, whom Lady Heriot was learning to employ more and more as her secretary, contrived to impart to her letter a decided flavour of ungraciousness. Sir Adrian had felt hurt, and the pain was none the less acute for the circumstance that self-respect enjoined that it should be endured in silence. The grievance was enhanced by Lady Heriot's behaviour to Jack. He had come to London, fired with the project of studying as a painter. He would naturally have gone to his grandmother's as to his home, and at first he had done so. But his reception had not been cordial. Lady Heriot was prejudiced against him. She disliked all that she had heard of his views, his erratic behaviour, his violent language, his readiness for disputation. She was greatly displeased with his father, and did not care to conceal her displeasure. Jack could not endure the least hint of disparagement of his father, had blazed out in his defence, and had gone away at last in a huff. The next time that he called his grandmother was out; the next, she was lying down and too tired to see him; the next, his aunt Isabella appeared on the scene, and gave him a snubbing.

Then Jack's visits to his grandmother had ceased altogether.

The field was clear; Valentine and his wife were the only members of the family who were to be found in Seymour Street. The moment for action had arrived. Mrs. Valentine was not the woman to flinch. She had screwed her courage to the sticking place. She was now sacrificing her own tastes heroically in the furtherance of her designs. The Season was at its height; she had a hundred engagements which she would fain have kept, but she gave up everything to devote herself to her mother-in-law. Valentine, too, made a point of coming every afternoon on his way home from business, and spending some time beside his mother's sofa. Both were kind, assiduous, suggestive, somewhat domineering. But Lady Heriot felt no temptation to resist their domination. Her old pleasure in independence was gone. She was feeble. Everything tired her. The grasshopper had become a burthen. Her business troubles, when she tried to think about them by herself, seemed serious, overpowering. It was a comfort to have Valentine coming in, day after day, cool, cheerful, collected, seeing the way clearly through the thickest tangles, making light of matters which had seemed to his mother very grave indeed. It was a relief when Isabella arrived opportunely to write notes, make her arrangements, decide for her small matters, the decision of which was perplexing her. Lady Heriot had been a great correspondent, and was loth to abandon the habit; but the pile of unanswered letters—pleasure or business—grew apace, despite all the efforts to reduce it.

Mrs. Valentine had found her one day sitting in a helpless way with a small mountain of envelopes before her. 'Dear mother,' she said, 'you are quite unfit to write letters to-day. Do not try; tell me what you wish said and I will do it, or, better still, do not trouble about your letters to-day at all, and let me read to you a story. You will feel stronger to-morrow.'

Lady Heriot would have greatly resented such a proposal in her stronger days. Even now she did not surrender with-

out a struggle. 'Thank you, Isabella,' she had said, 'if you will write one or two notes at my dictation I shall do well enough. The letters can wait. The days that I am pretty well they amuse me.'

Those days, however, came seldomer and seldomer. It was in vain that Lady Heriot postponed the moment when her letter-writing must be done through another. Her growing infirmity refused to be ignored. Her daughter-in-law was always at hand. Her aid, proffered with much dutiful affection, soon became a necessity.

One morning Mrs. Heriot happened to be at her mother's when Mr. Battiscombe paid his customary visit. She met him on the stairs, invited him to the library, and confided to him her view of the worry which Lady Heriot's letters were becoming to her. Mr. Battiscombe was greatly impressed by this virtuous daughter's good sense and devotion. 'We must stop that, of course,' he said; 'I must warn her against it; but you can manage it best. Keep troublesome letters out of her way. Answer the others for her. Whatever happens do not let her be worried. Quiet is indispensable.'

The doctor's instructions found their way to the servants. It became the rule of the house that all letters for Lady Heriot should lie on the hall-table till Mrs. Valentine arrived. She then took possession of those which wore the air of business; answered some, kept others, which seemed of importance, for her husband; threw away those which required no answer; took to her mother-in-law a small residuum, which she read to her, and answered for her.

'Isabella is the greatest comfort to me,' Lady Heriot told Valentine; 'I was finding my letters a grievous burthen: now I quite enjoy them.'

Nothing could be more obvious than that each fresh occasion of excitement produced worse results on Lady Heriot's health; and, accordingly, that the necessity of preventing such occasions was becoming more urgent. On no account whatever, Mr. Battiscombe told the nurse, must anything calculated to harass or agitate the invalid be allowed to come near her. Anything like a shock might

produce the most serious consequences. The great thing was to keep her mind at ease. Thus it came about that no letter found its way to Lady Heriot except through her daughter-in-law's hands; nor any but such as she deemed it expedient for her mother to know about. From this state of things it followed, as a natural and easy consequence, that Mrs. Valentine should feel justified in suppressing some inconvenient facts, misrepresenting others, and generally departing from the strict confines of truth whenever it became, for any reason, desirable to keep the invalid in the dark.

So Isabella Heriot became installed as nurse in chief. Her mother-in-law felt constantly less and less competent to resist, even to question her authority. Isabella was mistress of the house. She managed all business efficiently, energetically, adroitly. The servants learnt that she was a person whom it was well to conciliate. A maid, who had shown a disposition to question her authority, found herself, to her extreme astonishment and disgust, suddenly dismissed. But to those who propitiated her by ready subservience, Mrs. Valentine was amiability itself. The influence of this agreeable despotism permeated the household. Mrs. Valentine's supremacy in the sick-room was presently reinforced by a nurse, who arrived from the hospital, was engaged by her, received instructions from her, and felt no inclination to dispute them. Mr. Battiscombe, when he paid his daily visits, was not displeased to find an agreeable lady ready to relieve the monotony of his professional labours. His little chat with Mrs. Heriot was an agreeable break. Isabella, dressed with becoming simplicity—bright, active, solicitous—was ever at her post, the type of feminine sympathy, energy, resource. Her ascendency was complete.

An unconscious but powerful ally presented himself in the person of her little boy. Antinous was at a charming stage, and, as every one admitted, a most dear little fellow. His visits to his grandmother were the great amusement of her day. However ill, however suffering she might be, she never forgot this, or would consent to forego it. The child

liked his visit to his grandmother's, where every one conspired to spoil him. He was encouraged to like it. Day by day he came—the pink of juvenile courtesy—and prattled to the old lady in artless affectionate accents. Antinous was a well-conducted young gentleman, and had learnt by early initiation the supreme importance of behaving properly. His grandmother thought him a little angel; and could not have got through the afternoon without a visit from this small consoler; and the small consoler never failed. One of his unconscious functions was to show his mother at her best. With him and about him Mrs. Valentine was perfectly sincere. Her icy side, her worldliness, hardness, frivolity, melted before a genial glow of maternal affection. Here, for once, she was tender, anxious, romantic, all that a mother should be. Lady Heriot liked many things about her daughter-in-law, but nothing in her pleased her so well as her devotion to her child. Devotion, however, is tempted to be unscrupulous. Mrs. Valentine's devotion took the form of a passionate anxiety to secure for little Antinous the prize which was so nearly within her grasp, which might so easily escape it. There could be no delay, for Isabella had become aware that her mother-in-law was very near her end, and that the hours during which she would be able to act with any show of independence were numbered.

CHAPTER XVII

'THIS DEED IS YET TO DO'

'But screw your courage to the sticking place,
And we'll not fail!'

'I WOULD,' writes an agreeable moralist, 'have a woman true as death. At the first real lie, which works from the heart outwards, she should be gently chloroformed into a better world, where she could have an angel for a governess, and feed on strange fruits, which will make her all over again, even to her bones and marrow.'

It would be as profitless as impolite to conjecture how large a gap might be occasioned among many ornaments of modern society if ever any such stringent scheme of moral rehabilitation became more than a play of fancy. Mrs. Heriot, it must be feared, had long ago told *her* first lie. She was already committed to a bold investment in mendacity; yet she had done little more than prepare the ground for the achievement which she had at heart. Lady Heriot's will was as yet, so far as any one knew, unaltered. She must be made to alter it. In a few weeks—a few days—the precious wealth—so long the object of desire, of hope, of contrivance—might be irretrievably lost,—gone to pay Sir Adrian's bills, to float his silly schemes, to satisfy creditors who little deserved satisfaction, to enable Jack to amuse himself with philanthropic fads and socialist experiments. Little Antinous would have missed his chance; and through whose default? Would such a chance recur? Do such chances, once neglected, present themselves again?

Why hesitate? The odds were, Isabella Heriot told

herself, greatly in her favour. On the one hand, old age, infirmity, the lessening power, the clouded intellect, the wavering will. On the other, youth, strength, health, resolution, the firm hand, the iron nerve. What but the rankest cowardice could doubt of the result, or shrink now, at the supreme moment of consummation, from the means by which the result must be achieved? Was she, Isabella Heriot asked herself, or was she not, made of the stuff by which courageous deeds are done?

The position was critical. That afternoon, as she was driving away from Seymour Street, she met Sir Adrian, almost at his mother's door. He had hurried up to London at the news of Jack's escapade, had been to see him, heard his version of the story, and had come at once to explain the circumstances, and, so far as might be, to extenuate them to his mother. 'How is mother, Isabella?' Sir Adrian said, 'I want particularly to see her.'

'Do you?' said Isabella,' 'I would not, if I were you, to-day.'

'No?' asked the other; 'is she ill then.'

'She is not well to-day,' said Mrs. Heriot, 'and she is angry, very angry. You will make her worse if you go to her. She is much displeased with Jack, and has forbidden him the house.'

'Forbidden him the house!' cried Sir Adrian, turning very red—'surely not that!'

'Can you be surprised?' continued Isabella, 'why need he add to our disgraces? We have had enough this year, in all conscience, already, without courting notoriety among the pickpockets and ragamuffins at Bow Street.'

'Forbidden him the house!' repeated Sir Adrian, by this time thoroughly angry; 'then she has forbidden his father. I certainly will not go in. Tell mother, when she cools, that poor Jack is not so black a sheep as she supposes. He was really not to blame at all, except the small blame of going to see a crowd. I will tell you how it happened.'

Then Sir Adrian described the occurrence from his own point of view, from which Jack's escapade seemed, at worst, a piece of generous indiscretion. 'Forbid him the house,

indeed! You must tell mother the truth about it, Isabella. I trust you to do so.'

'I will tell her, Adrian,' said Mrs. Heriot; 'I will do my best for you. Leave it to me. By the way, shall I drop you at the Station? I am just going for a drive, and have nowhere particular to go to, and we can have a chat.'

So Sir Adrian was driven safely off the field. On the way to the Station Mrs. Valentine talked kindly and affectionately to him, sympathised warmly in the Huntsham troubles, and sent many tender messages to her sister-in-law. 'I will keep you informed as to how mother is, and what is her mood toward you and Jack. Your coming to her just now would only do harm in every way; only wait patiently, and I have good hopes. I will do my best.'

Sir Adrian took his departure, sad, angry, humiliated. He loved his mother heartily, and now he was estranged from her. She was acting harshly, cruelly, not as a mother should. It was revolting to think that Isabella stood between them, and that he was actually dependent on her mediatory services to effect a reconciliation. Any how he would stand by Jack, cost him what it might!

Two days later Lady Heriot made an unexpected rally. She seemed in better force than for weeks past. She had shaken off the lethargy which had been benumbing her; her mind had recovered its tone, its clearness; she was feeling strong and well.

The doctor, when he came, as usual, in the morning, was surprised and pleased at his patient's improvement; he observed to the nurses on her fresh access of vigour, her brightness, her clearness of mind, her good spirits.

When, a little later, Mrs. Valentine came, she found her mother-in-law walking with a nurse's aid about her drawing-room. There was a strange glow of colour in her cheeks. Her eyes could still flash—keen and eager—from beneath a gray beetling brow. They flashed now, when Lady Heriot began to talk on the theme of Adrian's unkindness, disloyalty. No letters had come from him of late. The old lady stood, confronting Mrs. Valentine, with her shrivelled, trembling hand resting on her stick, and poured out her grievances.

'They neglect me, Isabella,' she cried. '*He* neglects me. I should not mind about Eugenia. She was always cold; but my boy—Adrian—my boy, whom I loved so well, and have done so much for! and who loved me once with all his heart! It is bitter, bitter, I can assure you, bitterly cruel.'

The tears stood in Lady Heriot's eyes; her voice shook with emotion; she was evidently greatly overwrought.

'Come and sit down, dear mother,' Mrs. Valentine said, 'and pray do not excite yourself; take my arm and let me help you to the sofa.'

Lady Heriot, clinging hard to Isabella, got back to her couch, and sank back upon the pillows. 'I could have forgiven everything but unkindness,' she continued, 'unkindness and ingratitude, want of common affection, common respect. If Adrian expects me to forgive that he is mistaken. I cannot. I will not. I have resolved to alter my will,—long resolved. I ought to have done it before. I will do it now. I shall send for Mr. Graves to-morrow.'

'It is well to do such things at once,' said Mrs. Valentine, 'if they have to be done. Can I help you?'

'Yes,' said her mother; 'go and get the papers, will you, Isabella? I want to look at them again,—the will and the codicil. They are together in the strong box in my room. The keys are on that little table, in my bag.'

Isabella went, with a beating heart, on her mission. It was a supreme moment. She was now to see the will—the fateful will, which no member of the family had ever been allowed to see. She was to see it, to handle it, discuss it. She held the keys; once held they would not be easily resigned.

Isabella's conscience had smitten her as she heard Lady Heriot's piteous complaints at Adrian's ingratitude, and saw what her deceit was costing. But conscience now! scruples now! There were other things to think of!

Mrs. Valentine came back presently with the papers, and found her mother-in-law impatient for her return, and in a communicative mood.

She took the papers eagerly. She held the codicil in

her hand. 'It all depends on this, Isabella. The will sacrifices you all to Adrian—all of you, Valentine, Antinous, are sacrificed!'

'Ah!' cried Isabella, the exclamation breaking from her in her intense anxiety.

'Yet I love them; they have loved me. Valentine has been a good son, and you have been a good daughter. I love you—you and your darling Antinous. But I was bound to do everything for Adrian. It was his father's wish; for years it has been mine; you were all to be sacrificed for Adrian, to keep him afloat. But now, what is the use? The estate is gone, or soon will go. The entail is destroyed. Depend upon it the sheriff's people will soon be at Huntsham again. Jack is disgraced; more money will only help him to disgrace himself further. I shall not allow it.'

'If you choose Valentine to have the money,' said Isabella with emphasis, 'he would, I am confident, be guided by your wishes about it. What is it that you wish?'

'My wish,' said Lady Heriot, 'is to save Adrian from the consequences of his folly, and Jack from the consequences of his; to save our family from disgrace, disaster; to save Huntsham, if it be possible. I do not know what to do, what my dear husband would have wished. I am unfit for business, quite unfit. I am weak, very weak. I cannot think for two minutes together. I ought to have done all this long ago, while I was hale and strong. It was very wrong of me to postpone it—weak, irresolute, idle. I have been much to blame; but it was difficult, and I delayed.'

'Why delay any longer?' said Mrs. Valentine, who felt that the final moment for action had arrived. 'You are well to-day, you know your own mind; you know what you wish; Valentine will obey your wishes. Why not act at once?'

'I have had this codicil prepared,' said Lady Heriot, 'It revokes the residuary gift to Adrian, and virtually makes Valentine my heir. It is all ready for execution. It merely needs my signature. I have shrunk from signing it, I still shrink. I have kept putting it off, but I will do so

no longer. I will get you to write for Mr. Graves and sign it to-morrow.'

Isabella was well aware of Mr. Graves's predilections. The idea of his appearance on the scene at this critical conjunction filled her with apprehension. Delay was dangerous.

'Is it necessary to have Mr. Graves?' she said; 'it is only an additional fatigue for you. And why wait till to-morrow? You say that you have already delayed too long!'

Mrs. Valentine spoke with a decisiveness which her mother-in-law had by this time learned to dread. Non-compliance meant a struggle, and a struggle for which she was very much disinclined and very unfit. Isabella's present reasoning was hard to meet. Lady Heriot could only think of one excuse for procrastination.

'We must have two witnesses. There is no one but the nurse and the servants. I do not care to have any of them mixed up in my concerns. It would not be proper.'

'Surely,' said Isabella, 'there could not be a better witness than Sister Catharine. As for the other witness, Antinous is downstairs with Malcolm: she is discreet, trustworthy, and silent as the grave. I will send for her.'

'I would rather wait till Mr. Graves can come, Isabella,' Lady Heriot pleaded with a somewhat beseeching tone: 'I cannot act without him. I am very tired. I have done and talked too much already to-day. I don't feel well. I have the strangest feeling in my head. I can do nothing more.'

Mrs. Valentine showed no symptom of giving way.

'Come, mother,' she said, 'get it done at once and off your mind. It is that which is worrying you. After all, it pledges you to nothing. You can revoke it when you please.'

Lady Heriot had sunk back on the sofa and closed her eyes. She took no notice of Isabella's last answer.

Mrs. Valentine rang the bell. A nurse came from the adjoining room. 'Will you,' she said, 'send down and tell Malcolm to bring Master Antinous to her ladyship.'

'Antinous,' muttered Lady Heriot faintly, 'dear little fellow. I have not seen him to-day. I want to see him; but he must not stay long. I am dreadfully tired.'

'You will be less tired, dear mother, when you have done with the execution, and have got it off your mind. It is merely writing your name.'

'Be it so,' said the old woman helplessly; 'but I would rather have waited.'

Lady Heriot lay dozing. Antinous and his nurse presently arrived. The child took his accustomed place by his grandmother's side. She looked at him, smiled, laid her hand tenderly on his head, and closed her eyes again; she wished to sleep.

Meanwhile Mrs. Heriot showed Malcolm the document which she was called to sign. 'My lady wishes you to witness this codicil,' she said, 'because you can be trusted, and will not chatter. You will see her sign it, and remember that Nurse Catharine sees her as well, and then you both will sign it yourselves. Go now and tell Nurse Catharine, and bring her in.'

'Grandmother is asleep,' said Antinous, who, half frightened, had slipped away from Lady Heriot's sofa to his mother's side; 'she keeps falling asleep while I talk to her.'

'Mother,' said Isabella briskly, 'here is the codicil you want to sign. 'Malcolm and Nurse Catharine are going to witness it for you.'

Lady Heriot opened her eyes, gave a half-frightened look at her daughter, and tried to sit up. Isabella helped her, propped her with a pillow and placed a blotting-book, with the codicil upon it, on her mother's lap, and put a pen in her hand.

'I am strangely feeble to-night,' Lady Heriot said, 'I see everything indistinctly. Give me my glasses, Isabella; where is it that I am to sign? I can hardly hold the pen.'

'Here is the place, mother,' Mrs. Valentine said, more and more impressed with the necessity of immediate action; 'but wait, please, till Malcolm and Nurse Catharine are here.'

Lady Heriot's hand trembled exceedingly, and it seemed

doubtful at first whether she would be able to produce a legible signature. But she persevered, and her name was written. 'I sign this,' she said, 'as a codicil to my last will and testament. Now, Sister Catharine, be so good as to write your name underneath.' Isabella took the codicil; and arranged the pillows for her mother to lie down again. Lady Heriot sank back with a gesture of fatigue and closed her eyes. 'Thank you,' she said, 'now I will rest again.'

The two women went to the table and signed their names in the place indicated for them in the codicil. Nurse Catharine arranged Lady Heriot's sofa and went away into the next room.

'Malcolm,' said Mrs. Heriot, 'you can take Antinous down to the drawing-room and read to him. I will stay here awhile. My lady is dozing.'

Presently Mrs. Heriot rose and summoned Sister Catharine. 'Come and sit here, please nurse,' she said, 'I must go downstairs and send my little boy home.'

Her movements caught her mother's ear. 'Are you going, Isabella?' she asked faintly. 'When does Valentine return? I want to see him?'

'He is at Liverpool, mother, and he returns this evening; but he must not come to see you to-night. You have had a trying day and are tired. You will feel stronger to-morrow. Valentine and I will come to you directly after breakfast.'

'Isabella,' said Lady Heriot, 'I am not feeling well. I wish you could let Malcolm stay here to-night. I want a face I am used to. Would it inconvenience you?'

'Of course not,' said Mrs. Heriot, 'but, mother, I will stay myself.'

'No,' said Lady Heriot with sudden emphasis, 'I do not want that. It would fidget me. You must be at your own home. But I should like to have Malcolm. Phillips is quite knocked up. She and Nurse Catharine have been hard worked of late. I wish them both to have a night in bed.'

'You shall have Malcolm, of course, mother,' said Mrs. Heriot. I shall be delighted to leave her. She will think it

the greatest honour, and she is an excellent nurse. I will send her up to you.'

The sick woman had closed her eyes again and seemed to be dozing. Isabella bent over and kissed her brow. As she did it a pang of shame and remorse shot into her soul. The sleeper's face—sad, careworn, suffering—stamped itself on her brain's retina. She knew that she would never be able to forget it; already she was trying and in vain. It was printed indelibly. The deed was done,—the end which Isabella had so longed to accomplish, which she had compassed in so many workings of her active brain, so hoped for, so contrived for: it was achieved, and, with the achievement, there entered into Isabella's soul the sharp pang of guilt, the consciousness of shame, of dishonour. She had always meant to do it; yet, now that it was done, it filled her with horror. She was appalled, she knew not why. She put the fateful writing back into its place in the strong box and locked it fast. As she turned the key it seemed as though she were locking away all happiness in life. Innocent she could never be again. Uprightness, purity of soul, the sanctity of justice, rectitude of aim—she had long trifled with them, disregarded them; now she had turned her back on them for ever. She had signed the satanic bond. Her part of the vile compact was yet to be fulfilled. Her soul was stained with guilt. Darkness was, even now, gathering thick upon her.

Mrs. Heriot put the key in her pocket and went firmly downstairs. 'Malcolm,' she said, 'my lady would like you to sit up with her to-night. I know that you will like to do it. I will take Antinous home and manage for him. Come in the morning and tell me what sort of night my lady has had. I will tell them to send you what you need.'

'Maggie can bring my things, ma'am, if you please,' said Malcolm. 'Perhaps she might be allowed to sleep here, too, and spend the evening with me. It is her last in England. They start to-morrow.'

Malcolm's young sister, Maggie, was passing through London, *en route* for India. Her mistress was leaving home by that week's mail. Malcolm, who was devoted to her,

had been allowed to entertain her for a couple of nights. She was to join her mistress next day. The two sisters had been hoping for a last evening together. Mrs. Heriot acquiesced at once.

'Certainly,' she said; 'I had forgotten about Maggie, but she can sleep here perfectly. Perhaps she will be of use. At all events you will get some of the evening with her. I will tell Phillips to have a bed made ready for her.'

Malcolm was a hereditary vassal of the Goldinghams. Her father had been all his life in Mr. Goldingham's employ, her mother was in their service when she married. The two had lived for years in the village in one of Mr. Goldingham's show cottages. Malcolm had been born there, and had gone as a help in the nursery during Isabella's childhood. She had been devoted to her, she was now devoted to Antinous, with the firm passionate loyalty which an enthusiastic nature lavishes on the single object of its devotion. The fire of fanaticism smouldered in her sad nervous eye; she loved the child now with a rapture which was almost fanatical. Some traits of a martyr's temperament might be read in her staid, self-contained, resolute manner, a composed aspect which bespoke a settled purpose, an iron resolution, an unflinching courage. How this grim Scotch Calvinist found her way to Mrs. Heriot's household and held her own amidst its highly mundane and frivolous surroundings was a mystery to all parties concerned. There was, however, a mutual liking. Mrs. Heriot bore from Malcolm displays of self-will and outspokenness which she would have tolerated from no other servant. Malcolm, while she highly disapproved many things about her mistress, regarded her as, for some mysterious reason, exempted from the stern standard of duty by which she judged all other mortals. The child was greatly attached to her, and Mrs. Heriot, too busy and too fine a lady to be able to spare much thought or time for the cares of the nursery, was well content to leave him in the charge of one of whose care and fidelity she was so well assured.

CHAPTER XVIII

'LAST SCENE OF ALL'

'Vex not his ghost! O let him pass! He hates him
That would upon the rack of this tough world
Stretch him out longer.'

VALENTINE learnt with some surprise that the codicil was actually signed. Some such disposition of her wealth had been, he knew, in his mother's thoughts for long. She had hinted at it more than once, but rather in the light of a possible alternative than of an immediately contemplated act. It was, Valentine felt, characteristic of his wife's effectiveness that she should have brought a vague idea to practical realisation. As to the means employed for this result Valentine felt that it would not be well to ask too much. Isabella had, no doubt, influenced his mother—no doubt had not influenced her favourably to Adrian. As to Adrian and his doings Valentine was completely in the dark. The two brothers were upon the coldest terms. Sir Adrian had learnt of Jack's quarrel with his uncle, and had greatly resented it. As usual he was in a huff, and would write to none of his relations. Valentine knew only that his brother's usual letter to his mother had ceased to arrive, and that Sir Adrian himself had not been to see her. If Adrian chose to behave in this outrageous way while his mother was sinking every week to a lower stage of infirmity it was no business of Valentine's to interfere. He was startled, however, by his wife's announcement of Lady Heriot's altered will—startled, and not too well pleased. He had tried to silence his conscience; but its persistent

reproofs—not to be silenced or ignored—were a source of discomfort. He had often abused Adrian's stupidity, often sneered at his misfortunes; but it was another matter to take his elder brother's portion, to grow rich at what was practically his brother's disherison. Put it in what light he would, Valentine could not feel comfortable about it. He received the news with a marked absence of any expression of pleasure. His feelings about the transaction were as little agreeable as his wife's, though he knew but a portion of its unpleasantness.

A sense of guilt was weighing on their spirits. Life seemed to have grown darker to both, overcast with a sudden unaccountable gloom. All was going well, more than well, Isabella again and again assured herself; but, despite these efforts at self-encouragement, she experienced a sickening sense of ill. Such is the doom of the unhappy soul which quits the steep rugged path of right for ambrosial meads, which lie on either side, smiling gaily with poisonous flowers, with dust apples bright to the eye and bitter to the taste.

So Valentine and his wife went to bed with heavy hearts and agitated nerves. They passed a troubled night—uneasy slumbers, broken by bad dreams and sudden awakenings. A presentiment of coming trouble beset them even in sleep. When, at four o'clock, a cab came rattling into the silent street, and stopped below their windows, and then followed a loud ringing at the bell, both of them were wide awake; both knew that a crisis had arrived.

Their presentiment was correct. Valentine let the messenger in. He had come from Seymour Street with a note from Malcolm to say that Lady Heriot had had a fit, and was lying senseless. If they wished to see her again alive they must come without delay. Valentine ran upstairs to tell his wife. The two looked at each other with a guilty consciousness of what was in the other's mind.

Isabella was the first to speak. 'We must go at once; I shall be ready in a few minutes.'

In the meanwhile Mr. Battiscombe had arrived in Seymour Street, and was standing with Malcolm and Nurse

Catharine at Lady Heriot's bedside. There was no symptom of returning consciousness. There was little to be done. The three stood in silence, watching the unconscious sleeper, already almost in her death-agony. There was an awful stillness. Outside the distant roar of London life had ceased. The world was sleeping; only here there was no thought of sleep.

It was a relief when Mr. Battiscombe broke silence. 'When did she speak last?' he asked, turning to Malcolm.

'About two,' she said; 'her ladyship asked me what time it was.'

Malcolm's voice caused the doctor to turn and look at her. She was trembling violently; her voice shook. Her appearance bespoke some violent shock. Her face was haggard and bloodless: scarcely the dying form on the bed was more deadly pale; her eye was wild with fright.

'Come, come, my good woman,' he said; 'you must keep calm. There is nothing to be agitated about. No one blames you. You have seen old people die before now, I suppose. The fit has been impending for days. The wonder is that it did not come before. It is well that it has come now to save her further suffering. What an easy end!'

Malcolm stood mute, motionless; her heart was beating violently; she heard its beats: she heard, too, the doctor's words; but they seemed dull and indistinct, meaningless to her. Answer him she could not. The doctor watched her with surprise.

'You have got no nerve,' he said, with some contempt in his tone, 'or something has upset you. You can do no good here. You had better go and lie down. I shall not want you at present.' 'People's temperaments are queer things,' he said to Nurse Catharine as Malcolm left the room; 'they belie physiognomies. That woman looks as if she were made of steel and oak—passivity itself; yet she is utterly unnerved at the sight of an old lady in a fit. She is almost fainting. Go and give her some brandy and water, and make her lie down awhile.'

Presently Valentine and his wife arrived. They found

the doctor sitting at Lady Heriot's bedside. She lay perfectly unconscious. In all probability, the doctor said, she would never recover consciousness. She was dying fast. Any recovery, beyond a temporary arrest of the process of death, was out of the question. The housekeeper had, at his suggestion, telegraphed to Sir Adrian, as there was no time to lose. He hoped that this was right?

'Quite right, of course,' said Valentine; 'I am much obliged to you. It is a question of hours, I suppose?'

'A question of minutes,' said the doctor. 'Death cannot be far, and may be very near indeed; no one can say.'

Lady Heriot, however, was still alive when morning broke. Mrs. Valentine sate shuddering in the next room. She could not bear to watch the dying woman. She was greatly overcome. She had never had anything to do with such a scene before, and it appalled her. And well it might.

Death is dreadful enough when it approaches us, soothed by fond regrets, sweet recollections, and loving hopes; but death, when it forms a link in evil machinations—when it consummates a dishonourable contrivance—when it crowns an edifice of base design—how grim, how horrible it seems! Isabella felt a horror seize upon her soul. The Furies had begun to lash her. Had there been room for repentance she would have liked to repent even now—to cancel the past, to wipe the tablets of her life clean from the wretched story of meanness and deceit. But the hour of repentance had passed. The writing could never be effaced;

> 'The moving finger writes, and having, writ,
> Moves on: not all your piety nor wit
> Can lure it back to cancel half a line,
> Nor all your tears wipe out a word of it.'

The past was irrevocable. Having gone so far, Isabella could not, dared not stop. The wicked deed, however passionately she might long to recall it, could never be undone. However heavy the burthen, she must carry it now to her journey's end. She had put the cup to her lips; however bitter, she must drink it to the dregs. As

she sat by herself and watched the day breaking—the day which would be so much to her, so eventful—which would confront her with those whom she had injured and defrauded—Isabella felt, in her despairing soul—as so many a wrong-doer has felt before—that one horrid feature of guilt is the tyranny of its sway; another, that, however a man may drill himself to look at it, it assumes at times so vile, so detestable an aspect, that he wonders how he came to do it.

Meanwhile the practical necessities of the moment had to be met. Sir Adrian had arrived and Lady Eugenia. Sir Adrian had found Mr. Battiscombe in the dining-room, and had learnt enough to tell him that he had been kept completely in the dark. For weeks past, Mr. Battiscombe told him, Lady Heriot's vitality had been running down at a rate which showed that the end could not be long delayed. For the last fortnight she had been actually dying. Last night's attack was merely the crisis which for days had been inevitable.

'Why,' asked Sir Adrian, 'was I not informed of her condition?'

'I thought that you had been,' said the doctor; 'I repeatedly warned Mrs. Heriot that those of her relatives who were concerned should be informed that her condition was critical, her end near; she must surely have written!'

Sir Adrian walked silently upstairs, entered his mother's room, and found the dying woman unconscious, motionless, almost inanimate; an occasional slight breath alone showed that life was not extinct. Her hand lay passive by her side, where the nurse had placed it. Her face, no longer lit up by expression, looked frightfully emaciated, death-like. Sir Adrian knelt by the bedside, bent over that white, withered hand — how familiar, how dear to him — and shed some bitter tears. The mother, whom he had loved so well—who had been so dear to him through a lifetime—the long years of trouble, anxiety, sorrow—sometimes mistaking him, sometimes unjust to him, sometimes displeased; but how tender, how dear, how inexpressibly dear! And this was the end! She was passing away without one word of farewell,

one sign of forgiveness, one assurance of uninterrupted love. Sir Adrian bent his head and wept in very bitterness of heart.

Jack presently came in with his mother, and took his father's hand silently. He stood, awestruck, at the foot of the bed. It was his first sight of death. His grandmother had been a great personage in his life—a main inspiring character in the personal drama which each of us plays out for himself—a ruling standard to which everything had to be referred, a critic whose criticisms might be dreaded. It was dreadful to see her stricken down into helplessness, unconsciousness, death. One chapter of Jack's life, he felt, was closing. The scene impressed itself with painful distinctness on the boy's mind. His father, pale, grave, indignant, haggard with the shock which that morning's news had given him, with sorrow, with excitement, with wrath at the wrongdoers whose evil deeds were now revealed: his mother, weeping silently at the bedside; the nurses coming and going with noiseless flittings on their behests, or calmly waiting the last struggle; the silence broken only by an occasional undertone of talk; the guarded lights, whose faint rays grew pale as the bright morning came streaming through half-opened shutter and curtain; the little pomp and circumstance of the chamber where Death is soon to reign.

When, presently, Valentine and his wife came in, Sir Adrian turned upon them with a reproachful look, and failed to notice his brother's outstretched hand. Isabella turned ashy pale; she was coming before her judges, her foes. A new-born terror possessed her. It was in vain to pretend to herself that she was not afraid. She was in abject fear; of what, she scarcely knew; but she felt abject. What might not occur in the way of discovery and disaster? One bad result of an evil deed, it has been well said, is the crop of evil wishes that springs up around it. Isabella felt one such evil wish acutely just now. She wanted her mother-in-law to die, and die quickly, without a word of love, forgiveness, benediction to her children. While she lived there was a possibility that reason might return

sufficiently to allow of an explanation, reconciliation with Adrian, exposure and ruin to herself.

So stood the Heriots and watched in silence as their mother lay dying. It seemed as if the end had actually begun. Lady Heriot's breathing had become fitful, irregular, intermittent. The doctor had his hand on the dying woman's pulse. At last she gave a groan, opened her eyes, and looked around with fearful anxious expression. She glanced at Valentine and his wife and then turned to Adrian with a puzzled look, closed her eyes, and sank back exhausted, seemingly unconscious.

'It is all over,' said Mrs. Valentine.

'No,' said the doctor; 'the pulse is rallying. Death will not be yet.'

And so it proved. Lady Heriot presently opened her eyes again, this time with a look of intelligence, of recognition, as if she had been thinking out what she had seen before. She fixed her eyes on Adrian; she moved her hand towards his. He took it and held it. Then she tried to raise the other; her lips moved as though she essayed to speak. Adrian bent down to catch any uttered sound. But his mother was inarticulate; was aware, apparently, of her powerlessness. She lay there holding Adrian's hand, her eyes fixed on him. Again she moved her hand and tried to speak, and this time intelligibly. All around her heard the words; to some of them they were only too terribly distinct. 'All go but you, Adrian'; she clutched him tighter than ever. Her emaciated, withered hand, with death's pallor already upon it, seemed to hold him with eager tenacity.

'Go, go, I tell you.'

'She is wandering,' said Mrs. Heriot; but no, there was nothing like wandering in Lady Heriot's voice and gesture, which became momentarily clearer, more intelligible, and emphatic.

'Turn them out, I tell you. Adrian, I bid you turn them out. You stay; I want you.'

'We had better go,' said the doctor; 'she is perfectly conscious. It will agitate her if we do not obey her. Come.'

There was nothing for it but to obey. The doctor had opened the door and awaited their departure, ceremonious but decided. Valentine and his wife, Malcolm and the nurse, Lady Eugenia and Jack, went, with beating hearts, into the adjoining room.

'Shut the door, Adrian,' said the dying woman eagerly; 'bolt it.'

By the time Adrian had obeyed her, the feeble expiring flame was already burning low. But his mother could whisper still. 'My boy,' she said, 'kiss me!'

Adrian stooped and kissed her, that last sad kiss when each one knows that it will be the last.

'Why did you not come before, dear? I have been wanting you sadly. Is the door bolted? do not undo it; don't let them come in. Don't let *her* come near me. Don't go away. Adrian, are you there? Hold my hand tight.'

'I am holding it, mother,' Adrian said. 'I never heard till this morning of your illness. I came directly.'

'And why have you never written to me all these weeks?' asked his mother.

'Written! mother,' said Adrian; 'when have I ever missed my Sunday letter to you these dozen years?'

'Ah!' groaned Lady Heriot, clasping her son's hand with a sudden pressure. 'Kiss me, dear,' she said. 'Forgive me, Adrian. God bless you, darling; I have put it all right.'

Even as she spoke, Sir Adrian saw the light fade out of her eyes. She was shaken with a sudden spasm. Her grasp on Adrian's hand relaxed. He ran to the door and summoned the doctor.

All might come in now, for Lady Heriot was dead.

CHAPTER XIX

THE FIRST DARK DAY OF NOTHINGNESS

'——the vital spirits sink
To see the vacant chair and think
"How good, how kind! and he is gone!"'

A NOTE from Malcolm, which reached Mr. Graves by the morning post, brought that gentleman in the course of the forenoon to Seymour Street. He was greatly shocked to learn of his old friend's death.

Mrs. Valentine took an early opportunity of handing to him the key of the strong box, which, she said, had been placed in her custody by Lady Heriot the previous day. At the same time she informed him of the execution of the codicil.

'The codicil?' asked Mr. Graves sharply.

'Yes,' said Mrs. Heriot, I heard of it for the first time yesterday, when Lady Heriot bade me bring it from the strong box, executed it, and desired the nurse to attest her signature, which she did.'

Mr. Graves changed colour, and in vain endeavoured to modulate his voice so as to express no excitement. 'And did any one else attest?' he asked.

'My little boy's nurse, Malcolm,' said Mrs. Valentine, 'who happened to be here with him. You will find it in the strong box, where Lady Heriot told me to replace it.'

In the strong box, sure enough, it was, and justified Mr. Graves's worst anticipations. He came downstairs after its perusal looking as haggard and perturbed as if he had seen a ghost. It was, as he viewed the case, a lamentable mis-

carriage—more lamentable than any which had befallen him in the whole of his career. He could not be surprised, however, for he knew only too well how much this change in the disposition of her property had been in Lady Heriot's thoughts. The codicil had been prepared only a few weeks before, at her express direction, under his own superintendence. Its existence had occasioned him the profoundest anxiety, but he had been powerless in the matter. Lady Heriot had been peremptory about it. She was completely rational; no one had a legal right to interfere with the disposal of her property under her husband's will. She was an acute woman and experienced. She had the right to act as she pleased, and she had done so. Yet Mr. Graves felt that he had managed badly; the wrong result had come about. He was grieved, deeply grieved for Sir Adrian. He went at once to him in his room with the hateful document. 'Can I see you for a moment, Sir Adrian?' he asked.

'By all means,' said the other, pushing an arm-chair round for his visitor; 'but what is the matter, Graves, you look quite scared!'

'I have had a shock', said Mr. Graves; 'it will be a shock to you, I fear, Sir Adrian. Mrs. Heriot has just told me that your mother executed a codicil to her will yesterday. It appears that she did so.'

'Well?' said Sir Adrian, his heart beginning to thump, for Mr. Graves's manner bespoke him the herald of some disastrous piece of news.

'I have it here,' said Mr. Graves. 'Its effect is the worst that you can ever have feared. The residuary clause in your favour is revoked, and everything is given to Valentine.'

Sir Adrian sat stunned. 'It is impossible,' he said; 'there must be a mistake. My mother's last words to me were to say that she had put everything right.'

'She cannot have known what she was saying,' said Mr. Graves, 'for there can be no doubt, I fear, about this codicil. Unhappily I know its contents only too well, for Lady Heriot ordered it to be drawn only a few weeks ago, and has had it by her ever since.'

'But what about my mother's words?' asked Sir Adrian.

'Irreconcilable, of course,' said Graves, 'and inexplicable, except on the assumption that her mind was wandering—too likely an assumption, I fear, as it was but a few moments before death.'

'But she was *not* wandering,' cried Sir Adrian. 'I am confident that she knew perfectly what she was about. She was as clear as I am now. There must be some fraud.'

'We must ascertain all about the execution, of course,' said the solicitor. 'It looks like a case of undue influence. We will examine the doctor and the servants, and see what grounds for that view there are. Meanwhile say nothing to any one.'

Thereupon Mr. Graves had an interview with Mr. Battiscombe, and discussed the question of Lady Heriot's condition the day before her death. His account of her was little favourable to the theory of coercion or incompetence. He had seen her twice in the course of the day. She had been sinking for weeks, and was extremely weak; but that morning she had rallied, and had been particularly well—vivacious, cheerful, and inclined to chat. She talked about various topics, and was in perfect possession of her faculties. In the evening she was tired and drowsy. He had not liked to rouse her into conversation; but she answered his questions with complete intelligence. It would never have occurred to him that at any time during that day Lady Heriot could have been in a condition not to understand fully what she was about, or to be made to do what she did not wish. There was nothing in the seizure of a nature to suggest previous obscuration of mind.

Then as to her last interview with Sir Adrian. 'What was her condition then?' Mr. Graves inquired.

As to this Mr. Battiscombe felt much more doubt. 'No one could say in such a case how far entire consciousness had returned. She died a few minutes later. In all probability entire consciousness would not return; not such consciousness as would allow of any importance being

attached to what she said. It might well be, and this, on all the facts of the case, was the doctor's inference from her language and behaviour, that Lady Heriot was labouring under some delusion. Her wanting to turn them all out and have the door bolted looked like it.

It was obvious that no clue was to be found in this quarter. Mr. Graves next betook himself to the two witnesses. Nurse Catharine's evidence entirely corroborated the doctor's as to Lady Heriot's condition throughout the previous day. It had been the best day she had passed for some weeks. She had done a little too much in the forenoon, and was tired and drowsy towards evening. Nurse Catharine had been in her room or the adjoining one all day. It had been settled that Mrs. Malcolm should sit up with her ladyship that night, and at one o'clock, accordingly, Nurse Catharine had gone to bed. During the previous hours she had been in attendance Lady Heriot was restless and uncomfortable, the result perhaps of the long sleep she had had after executing the codicil. As to her condition then, Nurse Catharine said that, so far as she could judge, no one could be more completely in the possession of her faculties than Lady Heriot had been throughout.

Malcolm, when questioned as to the execution, showed a return of her former nervousness. Lady Heriot's death seemed to have given her a shock, the effects of which she could not shake off. She turned pale when summoned to Mr. Graves's presence, and was evidently in profound distress. She was, however, clear and decided in her answers. Lady Heriot, she said, had been unusually well that day —stronger and better than for some time past. She had seen her doctor in the forenoon, and was encouraged by feeling herself stronger. She saw him again in the evening. She had even walked about the drawing-room in the afternoon. She had seen her little grandson as usual. She was, Mrs. Malcolm would say, completely in command of her faculties throughout the day, perfectly mistress of herself and her actions, and fully aware of what she was about when she signed the codicil. Mrs. Valentine Heriot had

been there as usual in the afternoon, but she and Nurse Catharine had been in and out of the room during the whole visit, and had heard nothing but ordinary conversation; there was nothing like an argument or dispute. Mrs. Heriot had not, in her hearing, urged the execution.

'And,' inquired Mr. Graves, 'Lady Heriot had a good night?'

'No,' said Malcolm, 'she was restless. The doctor came at nine; she talked to him. After that I went to lie down. I sat up with her ladyship after one instead of the nurse. The seizure occurred at three, with no previous warning.'

'Was Lady Heriot conscious during the night?'

'Yes,' said Mrs. Malcolm, 'I was in attendance on her ladyship frequently, and talked to her. She told me what medicines to give her, and bade me write a note to Mr. Graves, begging him to come without fail to her in the morning, which accordingly I did.'

'Yes,' said the solicitor, 'and who posted it?'

I went and called my sister Maggie, who was sleeping in the adjoining room, and bade her go. After that my lady was more at ease and seemed to doze. I sat by the bedside watching her. At three o'clock she had the fit. I called out to Nurse Catharine. We rang for the servants, and sent off for Mr. Battiscombe.'

'And your sister Maggie?' asked Mr. Graves; 'where is she?'

'She went to the Docks this morning to join her mistress's ship. They were to sail at nine.'

'And nothing else occurred?' asked the solicitor. 'Try and think.'

'Nothing,' said Malcolm.

Then Mr. Graves examined the other servants. None of them knew anything of the night's occurrences till they had been aroused by the intelligence of Lady Heriot's seizure.

'Was there no one else sleeping in the house?'

'No one,' Mrs. Phillips said, 'except a young girl, Mrs. Malcolm's sister, who was going to service, and who had

been allowed to spend the evening with her and to sleep in Seymour Street. I was desired to have a room made ready for her. I put her in the room next to the nurse's. She had to join her mistress at the Docks to sail for India. I sent her off at six this morning in a cab.'

Sir Adrian had sat in silent desperation as the examination proceeded and one witness after another corroborated the story of Lady Heriot's competence. He felt a deep sense of injury. Whatever his mother might have thought at last, it was clear that within twelve hours of her death she had intended to disinherit him. She had prepared for doing so. She had intended it. He would not, if he could, dispute her intention.

'It is perfectly clear,' he said, in the broken tones of a man repressing intense emotion. 'There is nothing to be done. I would not in any case contest my mother's will.'

'We have to be sure that it *was* her will,' said Mr. Graves. 'We have not as yet much ground for doubting it.'

'We have none,' said Sir Adrian; 'we have examined every one.'

'Every one but the girl,' said Mr. Graves; 'we must examine her.'

'Would it be worth while?' said Sir Adrian; 'you will hardly catch her nearer than Bombay.'

'We can have her examined by commission in India,' persisted the lawyer, 'and we must do so. You can never tell what you may come upon.'

'What could we possibly come upon?' said Sir Adrian pettishly. 'No! it is perfectly useless. I have no money to throw away upon useless litigation. How could her evidence help us? Is it likely that it would?'

'It is not likely,' said Mr. Graves, 'but it is the unlikely things that are always happening.'

'I think it unnecessary,' said Sir Adrian, 'and undesirable. I do not care to dispute what my mother chose to do. Her wish is law.'

Two days later, when Mr. Graves came again to see Sir Adrian in Seymour Street, he found Mrs. Hazelden closeted with her brother. She still bore signs of the shock which

the news of her mother's death—the sight of her corpse—had given her. Sir Adrian had gone through a dreadful scene when, on her first arrival, he had to tell her that all was over. ''Why was I never told about her illness?' she had cried.

'That is more than I can tell you, Lydia,' Sir Adrian had said, 'why was not I? I heard of it only this morning myself, after the attack. Mother recovered only just enough to know me, and to speak a couple of sentences.'

Then Sir Adrian had gone on to tell his sister how a codicil, giving the family money to Valentine, and executed the day before, had been found in the strong box along with the will.

'There is no doubt about it,' said Sir Adrian; 'there stands the codicil; the property is Valentine's.'

Mrs. Hazelden was thunderstruck. 'It is incredible,' she said. 'Mother never did it. Do not ask me to believe it. It is impossible. She could not; she would not, I am positive. I have talked it over with her a hundred times. She acted by father's express injunction. Her last words showed that she had acted as she always intended. Nothing could have changed her: nothing, that is, but——'

'But what?' said Sir Adrian.

'Nothing but force or fraud,' said Mrs. Hazelden, 'or perhaps both—who knows? Isabella got into the house; kept us in the dark as to mother's illness; contrived to be the single one of us all who was near her for weeks before her death. That woman has lied, Adrian; she has intrigued; she has bred bad feeling between mother and you, and now we see the result. Nothing will ever induce me to believe that this wretched codicil was mother's act—her free conscious act—signed as it was, hugger-mugger, behind every one's back, and but a few hours before her death. Contest it, Adrian, to the last, I conjure you. You owe it to yourself, to Jack, to us all. Let nothing tempt you to give in. We will help you in the expense. Mother's behaviour on her deathbed; her desire to get Valentine and Isabella out of the room, and to keep them out; her last words to you, all point in the same direction. Isabella, of

course, puts a bold face on the whole thing, but Malcolm's behaviour bespeaks a guilty conscience. Her dejection, her prostration, her anxiety cannot be otherwise explained.'

Mr. Graves was a great friend of Mrs. Hazelden, and had a high opinion of her good sense. He respected her opinion. The case, he admitted, was suspicious. Still it was difficult to see from what quarter the invalidating evidence was to come. The attesting witnesses and the doctor's account of Lady Heriot's condition all went to show a complete understanding and an independent will. Some of the circumstances of the execution of the codicil were at first sight suspicious; but the more they were examined the less ground did there appear for impugning its validity. Lady Heriot's perfect competence was affirmed on all hands. It was not unnatural that she should wish to defer a painful act to as late a date as possible. It was what people constantly did. Mrs. Heriot's behaviour, though improper and unkind, and susceptible of a painful construction, might be read in a different light. Lady Heriot, in the state in which she was, might easily have forgotten Sir Adrian's letters. If they had miscarried, how would it be possible to bring the miscarriage home to her daughter-in-law? If Adrian had been kept away from the house, it could be shown, in Mrs. Heriot's justification, that the doctor had peremptorily forbidden all exciting interviews. If, on the day when Sir Adrian had been in Seymour Street, he had been admitted to see his mother—excited as both of them were on the subject of Jack's misadventure—there would certainly have been a scene, a most painful scene, which was the very thing the doctor deprecated. Angry and suspicious as Sir Adrian was, as indeed Mr. Graves himself felt, it was difficult to find such tangible grounds as might be stated in Court and serve for impugning the validity of the transaction. Valentine had been away from town and had known as little, apparently, of the whole affair of the execution as his brother.

So Sir Adrian, Mrs. Hazelden, and Mr. Graves sat long in confabulation, but separated at last without any satisfactory result.

'It is a bad business,' Mr. Graves said, as their conclave broke up; 'painful, most painful in every way; but what can be done about it?'

'I knew how it would be,' said Sir Adrian bitterly, as Mr. Graves concluded. 'I cannot contest the codicil. I see that clear enough. None the less, there has been foul play. I consider the whole transaction suspicious—suspicious and discreditable to all parties concerned.'

'And so do I,' said Mrs. Hazelden. 'I would stake my existence that there has been some villainy somewhere, if only we can unearth it. Contest it, Adrian, contest it to the death.'

'I see no way of contesting it,' said Adrian in a despairing tone. 'We should only be beaten. I am a ruined man. It is a comfort to be able to believe that mother did not intend to ruin me. Life has been full to me of hard things—and bitter things. This is the last and the bitterest.'

CHAPTER XX

CHRISTMAS AT HUNTSHAM

'That which we are, we are;
One equal temper of heroic souls,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will,
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.'

LADY HERIOT'S death was a widely felt misfortune. It broke up a *coterie*. The uniting link of a little community was gone. The spell, which combined a number of contrasting elements into a pleasant harmony, was no longer at work. No aggregation of mortals, it has been well observed, is complete without its invalid,—the person whom all agree in treating with exceptional tenderness; whom all combine to comfort, to amuse, to cheat of some of the tedium of a day of suffering; to whom all show their nicest, brightest, pleasantest aspect; in whose presence the strife and bustle and harshness of workaday life are hushed into a more genial, more courteous mood. Lady Heriot's death robbed her friends of a social centre. Without her they were lost in chaos, wandering aimlessly in the cold spaces of indifference.

Poor Crucible was inconsolable. The main occupation of his non-official day was gone, and gone with it the zest of life. His choicest pleasure, his warmest interest was extinguished. The Englishman is, above everything, a stoic, and Crucible displayed a stoical composure. But his heart was sore within him. He sat at the Athenæum reading gloomily, or trying to read, at times which for years past he had been accustomed to consecrate to his lost

friend. Many things which he read now, with a sudden lack of interest, suggested only the thought, 'How this would have amused her! How hearty would have been her laugh. How her eye would have lit up with kindly interest, with generous sympathy, with honest indignation!' Stonehouse, too, concealed his sorrow from the general eye. He appeared in Court—cold, determined, adamantine as ever—cross-examined witnesses, intimidated counsel, coerced the wavering minds of juries with logic carefully adapted to their capacity, poured out his torrent of precedent and argument on a patient but suffering Court, stuck to his points with exasperating pertinacity. But, adamantine as Stonehouse succeeded in making his outward man appear, his stoicism was only skin-deep. Beneath this stolid exterior there burnt a romantic sentiment of regret. Life had grown perceptibly darker, colder, less interesting, less worth living, less endurable.

There are moments when the business of human existence seems an idiotic waste of nerve and muscle; its triumphs a hollow mockery; its gains mere dust and ashes. Stonehouse was in such a mood—all because a certain drawing-room in Seymour Street had a new tenant, and an infirm old lady had, in the fulness of years, come to the end of her infirmities.

At Huntsham, when once the shock of Lady Heriot's death was over, life flowed smoothly and dully in its accustomed channels. Sir Adrian brooded on his wrongs, and found relief and satisfaction in demonstrating them to Lady Eugenia. Nothing would shake his conviction that he had been defrauded, and that Isabella was the wrongdoer.

Mrs. Hazelden warmly abetted him. 'I should wish the will to be contested,' she said, 'if only that some good lawyer might have Isabella in the witness-box for half an hour and cross-examine her.'

It was in vain that Mr. Graves wrote that counsel's opinion on the case was discouraging. Stonehouse, to whom it had been submitted, was, after a long consultation, obliged to admit that it would be hopeless, as matters now stood, to contest the will.

'I do not care,' cried Mrs. Hazelden, 'for Mr. Stonehouse's opinion or any one else's. I knew my own mother best. I am perfctly confident that she never, while in her right senses and of her own free will, would have left the money away from Adrian. In no case could I have believed it. Her behaviour on her deathbed makes it a thousandfold more incredible.'

In the meantime his mother's death had brought Sir Adrian some immediate relief in money matters. He had no longer her jointure charge to pay. He came in, with the other children, for a legacy of £5000, and this enabled him to sweep off a long list of troublesome little debts, and to feel for the moment tolerably at ease. No decent offer could be got for Huntsham, so that the question of its sale remained necessarily in abeyance. Jack came down pretty often on Saturdays to spend a Sunday in the country with his parents. He was working hard at his art, varying his occupations, however, by occasional flights to the curate in Shoreditch. His socialism had grown very pronounced, and his visits to his home were often the occasion of animated controversies, which Sir Adrian not a little enjoyed, and which acted on his nerves as an invigorating tonic.

A more substantial enjoyment presented itself in the form of a little gathering of old friends who had accepted Lady Eugenia's invitation to spend a quiet Christmas at Huntsham. Lydia Hazelden had been always in the habit of bringing her husband and children to her brother's for the winter holidays.

Her party of boisterous children, delighted to escape into the country, filled the dreary old house with sounds of merriment, and infected even Lady Eugenia's gentle little girls with a tendency to romp. Lydia herself, loyal, hearty, courageous in thought and more than courageous in language, gave Lady Eugenia an agreeable sense of backbone, and infused a sudden briskness into her view of life. Crucible and Stonehouse had needed little persuasion to come to a house where all would be in tune with their own thoughts, where others mourned the friend whose loss was costing them so much. They were glad, too, in every

possible way to stand by Sir Adrian. The news that Hillyard had written to propose himself was greeted with acclamation. Sir Adrian and Stonehouse had both been his friends at college. None of their contemporaries so well as Hillyard could recall the true note of academic life—its gaiety, its freshness, its intellectual enthusiasm, its literary enjoyment, its classical refinement. He would take them pleasantly back to old times, old moods, old habits of thought. Unfortunately he was to come alone. Olivia was paying a visit to her kinsfolk at the Pines. Hillyard had not chosen to accompany her. Olivia's absence was deplored. Poor Crucible's disappointment was undisguised. Jack, who had been at first inclined to suspect a prearranged plot against his enjoyment, was obliged on reflection to admit to himself that it was better for his peace of mind that Olivia should not pass Christmas beneath his father's roof.

Whatever might be his inward regrets, he felt a loyal obligation to entertain his father's guests. Nor did he find his task a hard one. Sir Adrian's visitors were congenial, sympathetic, anxious to please, ready to be pleased, resolved to be cheerful under depressing conditions. There were still in the Huntsham cellars some survivors of a famous vintage, a relic of Sir Adrian's early magnificence. Sir Adrian produced the precious bottles now, and his guests did all honour to them with much affectionate recollection of bygone merry-makings. Every one felt it to be imperative to be in good spirits and help Sir Adrian and his wife in their heroic cheerfulness.

Stonehouse had bought a magnificent supply of Christmas presents for the children. Jack's artist friend, Brandon, had come with him, and proved a perfect godsend. He drew caricatures of everybody, covered the walls of the schoolroom with the scenery of Bluebeard, and sang comic songs which relaxed even the stately Stonehouse's habitual gravity and sent the juveniles into ecstasies of amusement. Broad comedy, Jack found, is really an excellent moral tonic. While Brandon with a banjo and a blackened face was performing nigger melodies at one end of the drawing-

room it was impossible to be nursing melancholy at the other. Jack's face assumed a cheerfulness which quite belied the conventional gloom of a despairing lover. Stonehouse, who had been accustomed to regard Lady Eugenia as hopelessly bad company, determined now to get on with her, and found his politeness rewarded with brilliant success. He discussed Jack's prospects at length with her, and delighted her with a generous encomium on the well-loved son. 'He is just what a young fellow ought to be, Lady Eugenia,' he said, 'frank, rash, honest, courageous. You may be well content; he is sure to do well.'

Lady Eugenia began to understand why it was that everybody thought Stonehouse's judgment so extremely good.

So the little party which gathered round Sir Adrian's hospitable board was, notwithstanding anxiety in some minds, and an undercurrent of melancholy in all, not without its share of cheerfulness.

At dinner the talk flowed fast and strong. Stonehouse and Sir Adrian renewed the battles of their college days. Hillyard hovered over the contest like a Homeric deity, helping either party as fate or fancy prompted. Crucible contributed a seasoning of aphorism. Jack, unawed by such a congress of seniors, paraded his newest theory and last panacea for human ills, for the public edification. The party lingered round the dinner-table, as loth to quit a battlefield where victory is yet to win.

Jack's radicalism often raised a storm. The elders of the party felt it incumbent on them to do their best by satire, illustration, or argument to bring him to a proper frame of mind. He found all his fundamental principles ruthlessly assailed. 'You will admit, I suppose,' he said one night to Crucible, 'the elementary principle of modern government, that the majority must decide, and that the duty of the modern statesman is to divine their decision and to give effect to it.'

'The elementary principle,' cried Crucible; 'the vilest opportunism! No, Jack; Goethe put it rightly: "Nothing,

he said, is more abhorrent to a reasonable man than an appeal to the majority; for it consists of a few strong men who lead, of knaves who temporise, of the feeble who are hangers-on, and of the multitude who follow without the slightest idea of what they want." Nor has the British multitude now the slightest idea of what they want except more beer and less work, and greater liberty to thrash their wives.'

'It is the curse of restlessness,' said Hillyard; 'our age's curse. We all feel it. Nobody is content to be second rate; accordingly so many are third rate. Αἰεν ἀριστεύειν, you know—that sort of Achillean pretentiousness—an insane desire to be at the top of your class, puts one-half mankind against the other. But everybody cannot be at the top, or near the top.'

'There is great comfort,' observed Crucible, 'in not going in for honours, if you are only likely to get a Pass. Good feeding can be had in the plains without the troublesome necessity of scaling mountain-heights in quest of it. It may not be quite such a fine flavour as the other, but it is wholesome eating, and there is more of it—

'"The mountain sheep are sweeter,
The valley sheep are fatter;
We therefore think it meeter
To carry off the latter."

'The valley sheep may be tame feeding; all the same he gives you a rare good mutton chop.'

'I was reading this morning,' said Stonehouse, 'of some real good Tories, the Tlasculans of Mexico. They held that the souls of their nobles migrated into beautiful singing birds, and the spirits of common folk into frogs, beetles, and other insignificant creatures.'

'The wretches,' cried Mrs. Hazelden; 'toadyism that ranged even to the other world! In Europe we have always had, at any rate, a purely democratic Heaven.'

'Then,' said Stonehouse, 'pray what do you make of an archangel?'

'They are chosen by merit,' said Lydia, 'a purely competitive examination, I am convinced.'

'Or by seniority,' said Crucible, 'as they do in my office. I prefer the idea of that.'

'At any rate,' said Lydia, 'they are not hereditary, which is something.'

'Well,' said Crucible, 'there is the authority of Milton for believing that there are angelic footmen. What do you say to '"A thousand liveried angels lackey her."'

'A thousand!' said Mrs. Hazelden. 'Fancy! that beats even one of Lady de Renzi's balls.'

'But talking of promotion,' said Hillyard, 'I like Lord Melbourne's dictum on the Garter. "The best of it is, he said, that it has no nonsense about that infernal thing they call merit." Honours should go by accident. Then nobody is aggrieved.'

'Except,' said Stonehouse, 'the unlucky people whom no good accidents befall.'

'The world would be insupportable, however,' said Crucible, 'if everybody got his deserts and no one more than his deserts. When a piece of undeserved good luck befalls an official, à hundred others are cheered by the expectation that, one day or other, some kind genius will job them into something good. But then the great point about jobs, like diamonds is, that there are so few of them.'

'And some men are always finding diamonds,' said Hillyard, 'and wanting more. They "warm both hands before the fire of life," and air their portly persons at it, shutting off every ray of warmth from less fortunate neighbours.'

'And then,' said Stonehouse, 'they are not, like Landor, "ready to depart." The true jobber, or rather fortunate jobbee, like the Kings of Persia, lives for ever.'

'Let us drink to his good health,' said Hillyard, passing the claret bottle.

'And to his speedy departure,' said Crucible, as he filled his glass.

CHAPTER XXI

CHRISTMAS AT THE PINES

'Seeing his gewgaw castle shine,
New as his title, built last year,
There amid perky larches and pine,
And over the sullen-purple moor—
Look at it—pricking a Cockney ear.'

SIR ADRIAN, like a good Christian, made a rule of forgiving his enemies, but he could scarcely be said to have forgiven his brother, and he had certainly made no single step in the direction of forgiving his sister-in-law. On the contrary, he had fully determined to cherish an eternal unforgiveness. Isabella Heriot was, as he saw her, in the predicament of those successful sinners whom it could scarcely be the duty of a good Christian to forgive. She was flourishing like a green bay tree. She was reaping the reward of iniquity. The pangs, which at the time of Lady Heriot's death she had attributed to conscience, died away as the risk of exposure became more and more remote. When it was announced that no contest would be raised as to the validity of the will, she banished the last of her compunctions as to the mode in which its execution had been brought about. The addition of Valentine's wealth already bore fruit in the form of increased magnificence. Mrs. Heriot had a smart house, several smart carriages, and bore about in her own fair person many agreeable indications of an overflowing exchequer. She was in great request too; her dresses, her diamonds, her good looks, added to the brilliancy of many splendid

gatherings. She was greatly admired, as men frequently informed her by admiring words and behaviour, women occasionally by jealous looks. Mrs. Heriot derived satisfaction from either source. A triumphant beauty finds it easy to forgive her enemies when her enemies are mostly prostrate rivals.

There are limits, however, to all human success, dark spots in the most golden cloud, and the dark spot in Mrs. Heriot's cloud was the unwavering hostility of her husband's family. She was hopelessly estranged from the Heriots. Sir Adrian, the least vindictive of mankind, would have nothing to do with her. A sentence of eternal banishment had, she felt conscious, been pronounced against her by the rulers of Huntsham. Towards Valentine his brother felt even more bitterly, as a traitor to his family, to his own flesh and blood. A man is necessarily his wife's accomplice. Isabella would never, Sir Adrian considered, have acted as she had, but for Valentine's acquiescence, his sanction. He had added to his brother's indignation by overtures, the ostentatious generosity of which seemed only an aggravation of his original offence. He had written to offer to buy Huntsham and to let Sir Adrian occupy the house, as long as he pleased, rent free. 'Could anything,' Sir Adrian demanded, coming into his wife's boudoir with Valentine's letter in his hand, 'could anything be more offensive—in viler taste—more odiously hypocritical? Of course Valentine knows perfectly well that I would die sooner than accept the slightest favour from him; that I would go to the workhouse sooner than let him have Huntsham. Buy it, indeed, and with the money that is mine by rights, and I to live here as his pensioner! Eugenia, I will see him damned first!'

Lady Eugenia had never before heard her husband swear. She felt now that his wrath was dire indeed. And was it undeserved? Was not his oath the solemn formula of a righteous indignation?

Sir Adrian had written the curtest and most ungracious rejection of his brother's overtures; reinforcing the rejection by a broad hint that, in his view, there had been

foul play, and that people who profited by foul play were not the people from whom honest folk cared to receive favours.

Valentine had replied with exasperating calmness and plausibility. 'If,' he wrote, 'you really think what your letter implies, your obvious course is to contest the will. For my part I shall be glad to have it contested. I wish the matter to be sifted. The costs of such a proceeding would naturally, I believe, come out of the estate, that is, as matters stand, out of my pocket; at any rate, I agree that they shall do so. On the other hand, if you and your advisers can see as little reason to doubt the validity of the codicil as I can, pray, Adrian, have the candour to admit frankly what you dare not dispute.'

Sir Adrian remained haughty, angry, unreasonable to all gentle influences, all the more provoked by Valentine's having, as usual, succeeded in putting him in the wrong. Of course, in these circumstances, there could be no question of inviting the Valentines to the Huntsham Christmas party. Mrs. Heriot consoled herself with the thought that she escaped a dull and embarrassing visit; Valentine—brave it out as he would—felt depressed at not spending Christmas with his own kith and kin. Not all the attractions of a very smart party and first-rate shooting at the Pines could cure him of a wistful longing for his old home, its traditional ways, its comfortable homeliness, its effortless and unpretentious good cheer, above all, its familiarity.

Mr. Hillyard and Olivia had received an invitation, transmitted through Isabella Heriot, to come for a quiet visit at the Pines after the big party had broken up. 'I do not mean to go,' Hillyard had said at once, when Olivia brought him the letter. 'I will not go there again. They are out of my line. I am not attached to my cousin Isabella. But she has been kind to my Olivia. That is her redeeming point. Accept their invitation, Olivia. I wish you to go. I have some things to talk over with Sir Adrian. He wants me at Huntsham. I shall feel happy if I know that you are being well amused.'

Isabella Heriot had, in fact, written with real cordiality, pressing Olivia to accept her mother's invitation. 'We shall

be so glad to have you. It will be pleasant to see something of each other in peace. We have had a houseful; but almost every one has gone, and we shall be quite a small party—the Backhouses and a few gentlemen whom you met in London—Mr. Cosmo, Mr. de Renzi, Mr. Florian, whose last poem you can read up in the meanwhile, and one or two more. Do come, dear, if you can manage it, and help us to entertain them. Let me know the day, and we will send a carriage for you.'

Why was Mrs. Heriot so kind to Olivia? Was she fascinated by her beauty, her classic mould, her attitudes of unstudied, unconscious grace? Did she meditate annexing her, as old Lady Heriot had suspected, to add a new lustre to her entertainments? Had it occurred to her that Olivia, if annexed, would be a possession, a power? that her influence might profitably be rained from Mrs. Heriot's drawing-room? Would not small, *recherchés* parties receive an additional aroma of delightfulness from the presence of so rare a beauty? Does not brilliant talk coruscate with fresh brilliancy when smiled upon by lovely lips? Society is, after all, a campaign, a hard-fought campaign; might not a charming girl prove a valuable ally? If it is necessary to attract in a world where there are many counter-attractions, is it not well to have in one's keeping the magnet of which all mortals own the attraction? Or had De Renzi given her a hint of his readiness to explore a little further the innocent freshness of Olivia's unsophisticated nature? Had Olivia been the bait wherewith to tempt so distinguished, so choice a guest to her father's house? Was Mrs. Heriot but obeying her natural instincts as a match-maker? Was she dazzled by the possibility of a splendid match?

It was a wild idea, certainly—that De Renzi—the ambitious, the cynical, the worldly-wise, the cool hand, the cold heart, *blasé* with the experience of many splendid opportunities—should ever link his name, his fortunes, his expectations, with a penniless girl, who would bring to her lover no accession of any sort, either of money, influence, or social position, nothing, in fact, except a captivating face, a graceful form, a lively wit. Still, strange things happen;

the most improbable matches achieve themselves. Nothing in matrimony is so inevitable as the unexpected. Men constantly marry in a way that defies all explanation, certainly all anticipation. Hope springs eternal in the match-maker's breast, untrammelled by tame calculations of the probable. If ever this incalculable conjuncture were to come about Olivia's fortune would be made, and Mrs. Valentine's reputation established at a level beyond her wildest dreams. Dared she to hope? Scarcely; but so delightful a possibility, even in the vaguest shade of remote likelihood, may have forbidden her to despair.

Who shall read the riddle of a woman's heart? Anyhow, Mrs. Heriot's letter accomplished its object. Olivia wrote to accept the invitation, and a carriage from the Pines arrived in due course to bear her and her fortunes to the scene of action.

CHAPTER XXII

OLIVIA AMONG THE PHILISTINES

Tresham. 'Malignant tongue! Detect one fault in him;
I challenge you.'
Gwendolen. '. . . Witchcraft's a fault in him,
For you're bewitched.'

OLIVIA, as she drove along by herself on her journey to the Pines, and reviewed her position, was besieged by a disagreeable conviction that she was steering into dangerous seas. The prospect of her visit was exciting; a houseful of strangers has always some terrors for the youthful soul. Olivia was, indeed, going among her kinsmen; but they were kinsmen whose scant courtesy to her father had sometimes justified the cynical view that the chief use of relationship is to give poignancy to unkindness. To Olivia they all, especially Isabella Heriot, had been more than kind. Her father, she knew, disliked Isabella; but Olivia, who had heard only vague accounts of the story of Lady Heriot's will, knew but a portion of his reasons for disliking her. It was natural that he should; they had no interest or taste in common. For herself, Olivia shared many of Mrs. Heriot's interests and tastes. She understood the attraction of society—the pleasures that life promises to the votaries who court its enjoyments aright. Those pleasures seemed to Olivia, from the small specimen of which she had personal experience, extremely delightful. Moreover, she enjoyed the sensation of being petted, as she always was, by her cousin. Isabella had wooed her with a hundred small caresses, with little kindnesses, easy to confer but

pleasant to receive, with flatteries that steep the human soul in contentment.

But it was not with her cousin that Olivia's thoughts were principally busy. The casual announcement in Mrs. Heriot's letter that De Renzi was to be of the party brought vividly to mind the most exciting epoch of her life—the person who had contributed most powerfully to that excitement. Her horizon had been enlarged by a most interesting experience. In the quiet of her home, in the fruition of small pleasures, in the discharge of commonplace duties, that interesting experience had frequently presented itself. In it the personage of De Renzi occupied a foremost place. His character, as shown on the few occasions in which they had met, shaped itself in distinct outline to her mind's eye. Olivia could not but admit that it was impressive. He was not a man about whom it was easy to feel quite indifferent, even in remembering him. To ignore him, to forget him, was impossible; to pretend to forget him, hypocritical. His behaviour to her in London had been the greatest compliment that Olivia had ever yet received. It had been paid by one whose compliments were not to be despised. De Renzi had sought her society; he had devoted himself to amusing her, to pleasing her; he had established a personal relationship, strictly proper to themselves. He had courted her friendship. Could such things be experienced without excitement, remembered without emotion? Olivia's acquaintance with her brilliant friend had abruptly closed, like an unfinished air. They were now to meet again. Was the air to be renewed, completed? Would change of scene and circumstance—the lapse of a few months—have altered De Renzi, have altered her? Were they to take up the thread of their friendship at the point at which they had dropped it? Their encounter could not fail to be interesting; for that very reason it was somewhat formidable. Once again Olivia experienced the pang of cowardice which De Renzi's proximity had on previous occasions inspired. She recognised her former fear.

Tea was going on when Olivia was ushered into the drawing-room. The shooters had just come in and were

sitting round the fire. De Renzi was not among them. Everybody was very gracious. Mrs. Valentine was as kind as possible, took possession of the newcomer, carried her away to the tea-table, chatted pleasantly to her, and inquired about the Huntsham party.

De Renzi presently made his appearance and put Olivia's cowardice to flight. He was cordial, natural and reassuring. He established himself by her side, and was evidently bent upon a chat. Mrs. Valentine soon retired, and De Renzi began at once to be confidential.

'It is so nice that you have come,' he said; 'I heard that you were to be here, and stayed on in hopes of meeting you. I was beginning to be afraid that the hope was a false one. Now we will enjoy ourselves.'

The old sense of a special understanding common to themselves alone, was at once established. No one else knew the secret of De Renzi's coming to the Pines, of his lingering on when the rest of the party had gone. As he had come to the ball in London, so now, it was for her. That circumstance well understood, would colour all their future relations during the visit. They were friends whose society was mutually agreeable. Their intercourse, broken off abruptly in London, was now to be renewed. They were to enjoy the opportunity to the full.

How to resist friendship so cordially, so flatteringly proffered! De Renzi was, Olivia found, beyond any one she had ever known, easy, pleasant to talk to. With him conversation flowed on of itself, effortless, unconstrained, unconscious. Then some of the party would come up, and De Renzi would change his tone at once, and go off in a blaze of fireworks. Mirth is infectious to some natures; Olivia always "took it" directly. She often found herself joining in the fireworks.

Even Cosmo was interested. 'Your beautiful *débutante*,' he said to his hostess, 'is generally a fool—meant to be looked at, not talked to. This girl is like quicksilver. De Renzi will have a good time of it.'

Still Cosmo was the one of the gentlemen with whom Olivia could least get on. This was unlucky, for he was

the one most frequently at hand. He abhorred field sports, and seldom travelled farther than the billiard-room. His favourite way of spending the day was in the most comfortable corner of the drawing-room, with no severer intellectual strain than a novel to read or a lady to talk to. The massacre of pheasants, long tramps after partridges, the laborious vicissitudes of the hunting-field, were well enough for persons so partially civilised as Englishmen, who had rude health, iron nerves, and a great deal of superfluous energy to dispose of; but it was sheer insanity to mar the quiet of a cultivated existence by such barbarous expedients. Cosmo rejected all proposals of sport, and was always available for attendance on the ladies, so long as he was not taken too far from the fire.

'It is too selfish of you,' Mrs. Heriot had said, when, one bleak afternoon, she had tried in vain to induce him to join them in a severe constitutional—'too selfish to sit there, warming your feet over the bars, when we women are going to brave the cold!'

'The philosophy of selfishness is the philosophy of Hobbes,' said Cosmo complacently, drawing his chair in to the fire. 'It is freezing, I believe. I have an agreeable volume here. I must ask you to excuse me.'

He had heard of the prospect of Olivia's arrival with mock dismay. He was very much at home at the Pines, and very comfortable. They were a pleasant party; it would not be improved by the admixture of another and an incongruous element.

'There is a young lady coming here to-morrow—a beauty!' Valentine had told him in the smoking-room the night before. 'What do you say to that, Cosmo? Are you not delighted?'

Florian came into the room in time to hear the announcement. 'Man delights not him,' he cried; 'nor woman neither—not even that especially delightful form of woman, the young lady. But remember, Cosmo, we cannot get on without ladies, and, if we are to have them at all, we must have them young some time or other. It is a disease they get cured of only too quickly.'

'The right thing to do with them,' said Cosmo, 'is what the Frenchmen do—send them out of the room before the talk begins. They stop conversation.'

'But the modern young lady,' said Valentine, 'will not go out of the room. She is afraid of nothing and shocked at nothing. She knows more than her chaperon, and is not so easily frightened.'

'Yes,' said Cosmo. 'Nowadays

'"Girls rush in where mothers fear to tread."

They want to be everywhere. This girl will want to come and smoke with us and hear Florian's stories.'

'Not she!' said Valentine. 'She is a little piece of rustic saintliness—a lily of the valley.'

'Why not leave her in the valley?' answered Cosmo. 'Mrs. Grundy is bad enough, but Miss Grundy is the devil.'

'Miss Grundy,' observed Florian, exploding a bottle of Apollinaris into his tumbler, 'is a nuisance to us poor authors. We have to abandon many fine things lest she should come upon them and find them unimproving or shocking.'

'If ever,' said Cosmo sententiously, 'I wrote a book (which, thank Heaven, is the one sin I shall leave unattempted) I should wish to write for those who could not be shocked and did not want to be improved. I look forward to Miss Grundy's arrival with interest.'

'And I,' said Florian, 'with rapture. I am devoted to young ladies, because I can never understand them. Woman, like a conundrum, loses all her interest when you are able to guess her.'

'And I,' said Crucible, 'dislike them out of envy, I suppose, for being young. It is so hard that the young should have all the good things—beauty, innocence, enthusiasm, and the rest—just at the time when they can best afford to do without them. The order of events should be reversed, if I had my way. We should be born senile, prejudiced, decrepit, feeble, obstinate, gouty, wicked, mean—a hundred years old, in fact: then gradually improve into the respectable mediocrity of middle age; ripen, in course of time, into stalwart manhood; blossom from that into strong

and beautiful youth; and at last, in the fulness of years, pass into the blessed innocence of infancy, and die a little baby, and go straight to Abraham's bosom.'

'Beautiful idea!' cried Florian; 'you can expound it to Miss Grundy to-morrow!'

'But,' said Florian, 'the male young lady is not so bad as the converse phenomenon, the female young gentleman.'

'I object to epicene phenomena,' said Cosmo; 'they should be decently interned. Some specialist in philanthropy should devise a retreat for them.'

'The Middlesex Hospital,' suggested De Renzi.

'Well,' said Cosmo, 'I stick to my creed that the fairer sex should, in a proper world, consist exclusively of married women.'

'And cynical bachelors,' said Florian. 'What a prospect for humanity!'

Whatever might be Cosmo's views, Olivia's presence was to one member of the party its principal attraction. De Renzi had never felt a woman's charm so potent as Olivia's. Her beauty fascinated him; but beauty alone would not have been enough; nor was beauty Olivia's only spell. De Renzi had known many beauties, who had tried in vain to charm him, as he had tried in vain to be charmed. But he found in Olivia a fineness of quality, an originality, a delicate taste, an unconscious dignity, such as his previous experience had never shown him. Her greatest charm was that it never occurred to her to try to charm. De Renzi began to doubt whether, after all, the many nice people with whom he had come in contact were really the very nicest. Olivia was something more choice, more refined, more really clever. Her absolute innocence worked on him like a spell. 'Why,' her eyes seemed to say, 'should any one conceal the truth?' Candour so revealed was irresistible.

Thus De Renzi found Olivia the most interesting study that he had ever encountered. He had no thought of marrying her. The idea was inconceivable; but he resolved that, if the Fates permitted, Olivia should be a most especial friend. The Fates, always propitious, were now indulging him with an excellent opportunity of cultivating her friendship.

CHAPTER XXIII

SOME ESOTERIC POLITICS

> 'Pray, be content:
> Mother, I am going to the market-place;
> Chide me no more. I'll mountebank their loves,
> Cog their hearts from them, and come home beloved
> Of all the trades in Rome.'

APART from the amusement which she afforded to De Renzi, Olivia's arrival at the Pines proved extremely opportune. To some ladies of the party it brought relief, relief of a tension which was becoming distressingly apparent, and which, if prolonged, might have led to a catastrophe. This state of things arose from the circumstance that the companionship of Mrs. Backhouse had an unsteadying effect on Mrs. Heriot's nerves. She affected her in a peculiar and disagreeable manner. She aroused that part of her sensibilities which a woman, who cares for inward peace, must least desire to have called to life—her jealousy. Mrs. Heriot was anything but a jealous woman. To those who did not cross her ends or come into pronounced competition in her own especial domain, she was good nature itself. No one knew better than she how to live and let live; nor did she grudge her neighbour's success or resent another woman's triumphs over the feeble heart of man. There are limits, however, to everything; and Theresa Backhouse represented the point at which Mrs. Heriot's magnanimity broke down. Valentine and other gentlemen of her acquaintance admired Mrs. Backhouse with a fervour which Valentine's wife regarded as extravagant. Mrs. Backhouse was by no means a clever

woman, but her *naïveté*, backed by her good looks, did as well as cleverness. The *naïveté* with which she played the part of *ingénue* and made innocent remarks was irresistible. Mrs. Valentine had admired it at first, but she had grown tired of it, and tired of Mrs. Backhouse. Valentine had, of course, his privileges of amusement, just as Mrs. Heriot had hers; one of his privileges was to flirt with Mrs. Backhouse. His wife regarded the proceeding with contemptuous indifference. When, however, Mrs. Backhouse began to set her cap at De Renzi it was past a joke. Isabella's equanimity was endangered. The consequence was that, under an exterior of the utmost sweetness and with many professions of affection, Mrs. Heriot would, when opportunity offered, give her dearest friend a little stab. In return Mrs. Backhouse, who was amiability itself if unprovoked, was not averse to occasions which enabled her to retaliate upon her assailant with an acid drop. In the sublime precincts of Olympus the Queen of Heaven and the Queen of Beauty could not, we know, adjust their relations without some sharp resentments and an occasional outbreak. The fires of jealousy glow even in celestial breasts. They were now glowing fiercely at the Pines. There was an armed neutrality. It would not have suited either of the rival powers to go to war. A quarrel was not to be thought of. But, without going to war, it is possible to have a disputed frontier, unadjusted grievances, and an occasional skirmish. During the last fortnight the opportunities for these polite stabs and affectionate drops of acid had been more frequent than was good for Isabella Heriot's serenity. Mrs. Backhouse had come in an especially charming mood, and with a number of especially charming dresses. She had carried the gentlemen by storm. Her skating costume, with its effective contrasts of colour and pretty arrangements of fur, was pronounced a *chef-d'œuvre*. Her foot was historical. When Mrs. Backhouse essayed to skate even Cosmo left the fireside and, barricading himself in a movable fortress of sealskin, came courageously down to the ice to help her. Mrs. Backhouse, with a gentleman on either side, glided with the grace of a sylph, tottered,

struggled, and fell at last with the dignity of the falling Cæsar. Everybody felt it to be delightful. De Renzi, who had learnt to skate in Holland, and was a real adept, devoted himself for the rest of the afternoon to initiating the lovely neophyte into the mysteries of the outside edge. Mrs. Backhouse declared that no one could teach her but De Renzi, and that with him she felt perfect confidence. De Renzi, greatly in need of an opportunity of amusement, naturally took the first that presented itself, and acquiesced. Valentine was forthwith deposed from his accustomed dignities. Mrs. Valentine naturally felt aggrieved for her husband and herself. The hour of retribution had now struck. With Olivia in the house, Mrs. Backhouse was nowhere in the race for De Renzi. She herself felt it instinctively, and bent to the inevitable. It was in vain that De Renzi still continued to offer the ostentatious homage of profuse compliment. There was no concealment, scarcely an attempt at concealment. De Renzi had deserted her without a scruple and without a blush. After a few ineffectual struggles Mrs. Backhouse fell back resignedly on Valentine, and Mrs. Heriot had the satisfaction of reflecting that De Renzi was doing exactly what she wished. Meanwhile the *entente cordiale* was restored. The two ladies went amicably for a walk together in the park. Peace had returned. Olivia was the unconscious bearer of the olive-branch. She was as welcome as bearers of the olive-branch deserve to be.

Many things at the Pines astonished her, most of all the conversation. She seemed to have passed behind the scenes. The talkers knew about everything, criticised everybody, and mentioned as notorious a hundred stories which fell on Olivia's ear like the echoes of a disagreeable fairyland. She learnt that the real gossip of London is that which does not make its appearance in newspapers, or reach the ears of common folk. She heard many things which, but that all around her received them as unquestionably true, she would have considered incredible. De Renzi talked about politics in a way that made him seem more than ever mysterious. He was an active supporter

of a Radical administration; but no one, to judge him by his present language, was less of a Radical in feeling or belief. None of Mr. Grandiose's young lieutenants rolled off more glibly the sonorous variations of standard Radical cries, 'Confidence in the people,' 'trusting the democracy,' 'the wise instincts of the nation,' conjured more brilliantly with Mr. Grandiose's name, or denounced with more incisive rhetoric the narrowness and selfishness of the decrepit class, which the democracy had already reduced to powerlessness and would presently drive off the field.

Olivia had, since her return from London, read some of these passages with enthusiasm and delight. She had sympathised with the applausive shouts in which they had closed: she accepted their assumptions; she was convinced by them; she was profoundly moved. It had not occurred to her innocence to distrust their sincerity. She now learnt with amazement that the young democrat had the smallest possible sympathy with the objects of his praises, and the faintest possible belief in the remedies which he extolled. No one was really more cynically undemocratic. Some inconsistencies in politics are, he airily explained, inevitable. Allowance must be made for the necessities of party, of rhetoric. 'In party, you naturally select the winning side, just as in speculation you go in for a rising stock. In England just now democracy is on the boom. Everybody sees it, even Lord Mumpsimus. It is coming; it has come: the game is up. *Sauve qui peut!* The best way of saving yourself is to put yourself at the head of the advancing battalions, stimulate them to heroic exertions, and lead them to victory! What is the good of fighting a battle you are sure to lose,—which is already lost? Cato, I believe, and people of that sort love a fallen cause. Reasonable men—I among them—are for the gods and victory!'

'But how about enthusiasm for one's cause, standing or falling?' asked Olivia.

'The greatest possible enthusiasm,' said De Renzi cheerfully; 'why not? Human beings are so happily constructed that if you get enough of them together and shout familiar phrases at them loud enough and long enough, they go

into a sort of hysterics, and hysteria is a great political method, because one of its symptoms is to believe oneself convinced. It is like tickling children. The only thing, of course, is to tickle them, to give them what they like and as they like it,—the accustomed phrases, the popular names. The man who does this best is the best public speaker and the greatest man!'

'You talk in parables,' said Olivia, 'and this is a darker parable than usual. Of course you are joking.'

'I never joke on serious subjects,' said De Renzi; 'religion, politics, or ladies' dresses! Seriously then, if you have got a flock of geese to drive, you must get them along as best you can. The English, you know, are not a particularly intelligent race.'

'No,' said Olivia, 'not with all their education?'

'No,' said De Renzi, 'not even with all their education. We

> '"——blow upon them with loud wordy mouth
> Through watchword phrases, jest or sentiment,
> Which drive our burly brutal English mobs,
> Like so much chaff, whichever way we will."

But the secret of secrets is to know just how and when to blow, and of course to blow them the way which they wish to go.'

'And which way do they want to go now?' asked Olivia.

'Which way?' cried De Renzi; 'the road to ruin, the road to Avernus. We are already there; you can hear the roar of the waves. We are already in the surf, in the Revolution!'

'Are we?' said Mrs. Backhouse, looking up from her embroidery and letting her hands, which were among her strong points, lie in a lovely pose in her lap. 'I had no idea that matters had gone so far. But your plan, Mr. de Renzi, seems rather like trying to ride the whirlwind, does it not?'

'The only way to deal with whirlwinds,' said De Renzi. 'Riding them is, no doubt, exciting exercise while it lasts. One rides for a fall, of course.'

'And when you fall, you fall like Lucifer,' said Mr. Goldingham, 'and fall as far. No one can say when the fall will come. For my part I prefer to leave the whirlwind alone. Mrs. Backhouse and I are Conservatives, are we not?'

'Of course,' said the lady; 'but Mr. de Renzi's seems to be only another form of Conservatism—self-preservation.'

'Conservatism,' said Cosmo, looking up from his novel, 'like charity, begins at home. That man's the best Conservative who takes best care of number one.'

Olivia began to understand that politics were not quite so simple a business as her ignorance and innocence had supposed.

CHAPTER XXIV

ALAS, POOR YORICK!

'Sic cum transierint mei,
Nullo cum strepitu, dies
Plebeius moriar senex:
Illi mors gravis incubat,
Qui, notus nimis omnibus,
Ignotus moritur sibi.'

THE days passed pleasantly at the Pines. The party was agreeable. Its smallness gave it a tone of ease and familiarity. Everybody was on good terms with all the rest. The men talked brilliantly, Olivia thought, and made the meals amusing. There was a growing sense of good companionship. Florian read them some passages from his new poem and invited the public to criticise or commend. Cosmo's hoard of stories showed no symptom of exhaustion. Mrs. Backhouse bore her deposition like an angel, and was amiable even to Olivia. Valentine satisfactorily re-established his relations with the dethroned beauty. The weather was wild, but that only heightened the effect of the good cheer which reigned indoors. The house was luxurious; everything was supremely comfortable. Host, hostess, and guests were too good friends to be ceremonious. Each went his own way. In the mornings De Renzi was often buried for some hours in red boxes which arrived for him from Downing Street, enough, as Cosmo said, to swamp an administration; but he would emerge at luncheon-time as fresh as ever, his zest for sociability only quickened by a morning of solitary toil. His holiday, such as it was, had nearly ended; but meanwhile Olivia found him an

excellent companion, so gay, so full of amusing talk, so inspiriting. She was conscious of a fresh faculty of conversation when De Renzi was of the party, a new faculty of mirth. She understood now how it was that people pronounced him delightful. She was afraid of him no longer; why should she be afraid? He was her friend, as by a hundred small signals he made her every day more distinctly understand. He was a delightful friend! Alas! Olivia was young enough not to know what complications, disappointments, heartaches, delightful friends may easily produce. She knew only that De Renzi's presence lit up her world with sudden brightness, filled it with new interest. She knew not the secret of the charm, but she knew the result. She was under the spell. This man, she became aware, could interest, influence, dominate her; could force her convictions, could mould her very tastes. It was alarming but delightful.

All mortal things, delightful friendships among them, have their fated close. One morning, when the party assembled for breakfast, Mr. Goldingham announced that De Renzi was gone. A special messenger had come for him from London, and he had left by the next train. The blow was sudden. The effect was felt to be depressing. The prevailing good spirits received a shock. The gaiety of the party was eclipsed. Olivia especially felt anything but gay. It was some consolation that, by the evening post, there arrived a note to her from De Renzi, wishing her adieu, full of regrets at his departure, of expressions of pleasure in his visit. Olivia knew perfectly *why* it had been pleasant to him.

Two days after Olivia's own visit came to a sudden end. A letter arrived from her father announcing that he had come back from Huntsham extremely poorly. He had caught a chill on a cold afternoon's walk with Sir Adrian, and had neglected it. He was now in great pain and felt ill. He had sent for the doctor. Olivia must come home and take care of him.

Olivia lost not an hour in obeying her father's summons. She was greatly perturbed, for she knew that it could be no

trifling malady which forced her father to such decided steps. Some calamity awaited her. She sat with beating heart, as she drove homeward, tortured by suspense. Her forebodings were just. When she got home the doctor met her at the door, with a grave face that heralded misfortune. Her father was in bed upstairs, very seriously ill. His vitality seemed low; the case was one of some anxiety. Mr. Hillyard would be all the better for Olivia's nursing. They must hope for the best.

A mandate to hope for the best, thus given, is really a message of despair. Olivia's hopes, when she had once seen her father, sank low indeed. Hillyard showed no symptoms of rallying, offered no resistance to the illness that was hourly now gaining on his enfeebled powers. He lay, a mere wreck of his former self. The sweet bright smile with which he greeted his daughter alone remained unchanged.

Olivia bent over him, put her face by his, and burst into an agony of tears. Father and child felt that the end was near. Their happy time together was at a close. Death was knocking at the door.

A fortnight later Olivia stood chief mourner, amid a little crowd of village folk, all mourners for the kind friend whose kindness they would experience no more. They shared Olivia's sorrow; there was not a cottage where Hillyard's kindly presence and sympathy had not, in some moment of trouble, breathed comfort, patience, hope. A handful of peasants, a humble grave, a few loving tears, were all the funeral honours that told that poor Hillyard's career, once bright with such golden promise of success, was closed. 'A life of mistakes—the offspring of a certain moral grandeur, ill matched with meanness of opportunities,' ill matched too with some infirmities of will and purpose that put the prizes of life beyond his reach—still a man to be loved. Olivia turned heart-broken from his grave to the home that would be hers no more. She was alone in the world.

An empty carriage, which had arrived from the Pines, with a wreath of hothouse flowers, proclaimed the cold recognition of kinsmanship which satisfied Mr. Goldingham's view of what the occasion demanded. It was a dreary compliment,

a pleasantry which poor Hillyard, had he been alive to see it, would not have been slow to appreciate. Sir Adrian and his wife, however, had come in person and stood on either side of Olivia as she knelt weeping at the grave. Sir Adrian looked very sad as he led Olivia away. He too had lost a friend.

Her father's death seemed to Olivia like the end of all things. It was impossible, she thought, that she should find again a companion in every way so congenial. The father's and daughter's tastes completely harmonised. She loved his very shortcomings, his disorder, his dilatoriness, his unconventional and haphazard way of scrambling through existence; the philosophical light-heartedness with which he took the troubles of life. Under a careless exterior she recognised his cultured taste, his true refinement, his spotless honour. She had loved to pet him, to smooth his path, to free it from troublesome, petty obstructions, to defend it from the indignities that dulness is ever ready to offer to genius in difficulties, to lavish on him the tenderness of an affectionate nature. With him she always felt herself hovering between pathos and mirth. All her woman's tenderness flew to arms to champion him against the misappreciation of a dull, conventional world. They had been sad sometimes, but their melancholy was lit with flashes of redeeming merriment. The two had often had moments of depression, but both felt that in each other's society it was easy to be gay. Congenial companionship is the best fountain of good spirits; each new trouble only made father and daughter realise their congeniality more completely. Together they had faced their troubles and made light of them.

This happiness was Olivia's no more.

These pleasant times had passed away. They belonged to a vanished world. How could any others, as bright, sweet, and innocent be hers again? All things around looked cold, gray, repulsive. Everybody seemed commonplace, prosaic, matter-of-fact. The gaiety of existence was extinguished; and, its gaiety extinct, how rough and cold and uninviting the stern facts of life stood out!

Her uncle, Dr. Meredith, stayed on after the funeral, and proceeded to establish himself *in loco parentis*. In a father's place, indeed! but he was the very antithesis of her father,—gloomy, precise, business-like, somewhat stern to those who lacked habits of business or failed to appreciate the business aspects of life. He at once became master of the situation. Poor Hillyard had appointed him his executor; as such he went ruthlessly into the accounts, and speedily gave Olivia a clearer idea of their finances than the united efforts of her father and herself had ever, in times past, succeeded in achieving. When one or two big debts to the Bank, and a host of little ones to tradesmen had been cleared off, and a serious bill for dilapidations of the Rectory had been met, the residue would be but a pittance. Hillyard had insured his life for £1000, but even this scanty patrimony would not, Olivia learnt, remain intact. As Olivia's guardian, Dr. Meredith lost no time in letting her feel the hand of authority. How different from her father's gentle sway, too gentle to be felt otherwise than in the form of a caress! Olivia had now her living to earn. She might earn it, her uncle pointed out, among her own kinsfolk, in an easy, comfortable manner, if she chose to come and live in his house and take charge of her cousins. He produced a letter from her aunt which seemed to Olivia's eye to bristle with bad taste. There was much matter-of-fact, conventional condolence. But, among the expressions of sympathy there was disagreeably apparent a quiet depreciation of her father, a vigilant attention to Mrs. Meredith's own and her family's interest, a desire to carry through an advantageous arrangement. Her uncle pressed the point with quiet insistence. As her guardian he decided that this was the proper course. It would enable him to watch over her effectually, to discharge his duty to his kinsman's child. He could not consent to let her go at large upon the world, to find her way into some family of strangers, where all sorts of difficulties and annoyances might befall her.

Olivia's heart sank to the lowest depths of depression. She remembered that dreadful house,—its dingy precision,

its meaningless routine, its graceless economies, its mirthless bustle, its repulsive meals. No thought of the beauties of existence found a place in that dreary scheme of life. Many of life's enjoyments, beauties, interests, were, according to her uncle's creed, positively wrong, all were unnecessary.

Olivia had escaped, on the previous occasion, with a sensation of moral asphyxia, to the pleasant liberty and disorder of her home. The same horrid sense of suffocation beset her once again at the bare notion of return.

Unattractive as the proposal seemed, it was difficult to suggest any alternative. A momentary respite was afforded by Lady Eugenia's invitation to pay them a visit at Huntsham; but it was but momentary. It must end, Olivia well knew, at the first moment when Jack was likely to return to his home. On the whole there appeared to be no course open to her but to submit to her uncle's proposal. It was settled that Olivia should go to Huntsham for a fortnight, and then take up her permanent residence with the Merediths at Axborough.

Several dreary months followed—the dreariest that Olivia had ever known, more dreary than any she could have conceived. The younger cousins were common, dull, and refractory; the task of teaching them—of trying to teach them anything—was a grievous one. Olivia's teaching was quite unsuited to the stolid British boys, who were trudging, with reluctant steps, through the Latin grammar, or little girls whose musical antipathies were struggling hard against uncongenial acquaintance with the pianoforte. Olivia had learnt all that she knew—she hardly knew how—by the quick apprehension of appreciative insight. Her father's mood, his tastes, had infected her; she had learnt without effort because she loved the teacher and the lesson, and love lightened the task. Olivia, accordingly, was ignorant of many things which, according to her uncle's standard, every properly educated young woman ought to know; and what she did know she found it difficult to impart to natures the very opposite of her own. Her pupils evinced no interest, and made no progress. One attempt after another collapsed in dismal failure. Olivia's despondency

deepened; the schoolroom became a torture-chamber to all concerned, but the tortures of the instructress were, probably, the most acute. Olivia's nerves began to suffer. The horrid notes of practisings, when the same blunder recurred day after day with exasperating regularity, sounded in her ears at night, and filled her dreams with discords. Her uncle wore disapproval on a moody brow; her aunt showed disappointment by a reproving manner. The children sank ever into darker depths of stolidity.

Then came a still graver trouble. The little children were bad enough, but there were children no longer little, who were of an age to inflict still more dreadful persecution. The eldest son was studying medicine with the view of, some day, assisting his father and ultimately succeeding him. He was a dreadful youth—vulgar, commonplace, impertinent, and, above all—horror of horrors—amorous. Olivia felt a revolting conviction that the ogre—as she described him in her thoughts—was not to be discouraged by any arts of repulsion of which she felt herself mistress. She knew, too often, that his dreadful eye was fixed upon her with the languishment of unspoken love. He embarrassed her with an officious politeness, clumsy but expressive. He waylaid her with hateful kindnesses, with flatteries and compliments, with cousinly familiarities, from which her soul recoiled. Olivia felt, and tried to look, like a stone. But in vain! The dreadful crisis came. The ogre spoke his passion, his hopes; insisted upon knowing his fate, and, knowing it, behaved like a boor, parading his disappointment in gloomy rudeness, which added a new horror to Dr. Meredith's table. It is always rash, a clever writer has observed, to underrate the capacity of the future for being disagreeable. Olivia had never imagined that anything in life could be quite so disagreeable as that which she was now experiencing.

The ogre's mother took his part, and treated Olivia as though she had been guilty of a delinquency. Dr. Meredith broached the subject, and observed, in his dryest manner, that he regretted Olivia's evident determination to have nothing to do with her cousins.

'Nothing to do with marrying them, if you please, uncle,' Olivia said with determination. 'I am very sorry that the idea should have been started. Believe me, it is wholly impossible.'

Then Dr. Meredith had become dryer than ever, and was sometimes not even polite. It was a relief to all parties concerned when, as the summer was coming on, and Axborough was beginning to look its grimiest in contrast with Nature's smiling mood, there came a kind letter from Mrs. Goldingham, inviting Olivia to pay a long visit at the Pines. Isabella would, Mrs. Goldingham wrote, be there for a portion of the time. Little Antinous had already arrived with his nurse, and would be thankful for Olivia's companionship, as indeed they all would.

Dr. Meredith, not reluctant to end a bad bargain, at once consented. Olivia shook off the dust of Axborough from her feet, and caught, with gleeful expectancy, at a temporary respite from her troubles. Nothing could be quite so bad as what she had been bearing of late.

Olivia found her life at the Pines a delightful contrast to her recent miseries. She was her own mistress, except for such easy ministrations as a young lady can pleasantly offer to the mistress of a luxurious house. She enjoyed driving about with Mrs. Goldingham in carriages whose swift smooth motion contrasted agreeably with the dreary trudges, through dust or mud, which formed part of her Axborough day. She enjoyed paying visits with her at neighbouring houses, where she always found a kindly welcome. She enjoyed playing with little Antinous, who was at the precise stage when childish cleverness is most amusing. Everything became still pleasanter when Mrs. Heriot arrived, and showed at once that her liking for Olivia had undergone no abatement. Olivia, in her mourning, looked prettier than ever, and Isabella's mind was more than ever resolved on annexation. Olivia belonged, she felt certain, to the efficacious order of beings whose agreeable prerogative it is to sway mankind. There was something in her air that gave her beauty a special efficacy. Mrs. Heriot had played with the idea of having that success

achieved from her own house and under her own superintendence.

At the close of the summer the Heriots were to go to Scotland. Olivia was greatly delighted at being invited to accompany them. 'It is very dull; I ought to warn you,' Mrs. Heriot said; 'there is nothing to do, and no one within a dozen miles to speak to. The men are out all day, and too tired to do anything but go to sleep in the evenings. Their thoughts are of grouse, salmon, and deer—how best to kill them. It grows a little monotonous. If you will come and keep me company, Olivia, and help to amuse us all, it will be a charity.'

To Scotland accordingly Olivia went with the Heriots and Backhouses, who shared the moor. In these agreeable surroundings her life at her uncle's seemed already like a horrid dream. Even the ogre faded into indistinctness, and was forgiven and forgotten. Olivia took charge of Antinous's education, and pronounced him a little genius. The weeks slipped monotonously but pleasantly away. At last the moment arrived when Mrs. Heriot's scheme was to become a solid fact. One day, as their time in Scotland was drawing to a close, she summoned Olivia for a serious talk, and made a definite proposal, on her own part and her husband's, that Olivia should come and take up her abode permanently with them in London. 'Not that permanence means much in such a case,' Mrs. Heriot said laughingly; 'some inconvenient young gentleman or other will, I have no doubt, take good care of that; but as long as you like to stay with us.'

Olivia at first quite declined the proposition. 'Thank you,' she had said, 'Isabella. It is a most kind proposal. But I do not wish to be dependent on any one while I can earn my living like an honest woman.'

'My dear child,' Mrs. Heriot said with rough good nature, 'you will earn your living just as honestly with us as at your uncle's, with those horrid little brats of cousins; none the less honestly because a hundred times more pleasantly. I mean to make you work like a slave—to write my notes, to amuse my guests, to watch over Antinous and his

nurse, to make tea for me, to help me, in fact, in getting through life, which at present is more than I can accomplish.'

'In fact,' said Olivia, 'I am to be a maid-of-all-work, am I not?'

'Yes,' said Mrs. Heriot, 'a maid-of-all-work of the ornamental order; and no bad trade either. You will observe that I am taking you without a character from your last place; you ought to be very much obliged to me. But, seriously, Olivia, *I* shall be very much obliged to *you* if you will come, and the arrangement is, you must see, not a disadvantageous one for you. You don't want, I suppose, to vegetate all your life in a dingy provincial town, and grow up an old maid, or escape from that fate by marrying a curate or a schoolmaster——'

'Or an ogre!' cried Olivia with a shudder, recalling her experiences with her cousin; 'dreadful destiny!'

'Yes,' said her cousin, to whom Olivia had already related this disagreeable episode in her personal history; 'they would all be ogres, Olivia; it would be a hateful existence. You are destined for better things. I will lead you to your destiny. Behold your deliverer!'

Olivia felt her cousin's arguments to be unanswerable. The prospect of deliverance was alluring. The return to bondage in her uncle's house loomed black in the future, rich with horrid possibilities. She dreaded her dull, uncongenial relations, her unwelcome tasks, the likelihood of renewed love-making. Her mission was not, she felt surer than ever, to supplement the defects of her cousins' education. She felt full of capacity in a hundred different directions. She was stirred by ambition. She felt a vague longing for pleasure, for happiness, for success. Mrs. Heriot—a practical adept in the art of getting people to let her have her way—pressed her point with good-natured insistence. After a little more hesitation Olivia accepted her cousin's invitation.

CHAPTER XXV

A WINTER IN LONDON

'Ere one moment flitted, fast was he,
Fond bond slave to the beauty evermore,
For life, for death, for Heaven, for Hell her own;
Philosophy, bewail thy fate! Adieu,
Youth realistic and illusion-proof!'

THE winter is to many Londoners a genial period. It blossoms with sociability, and bears a bountiful crop of little dinners. The evenings are long, and give even the busiest a sense of leisure. The strong tide of society which rushed, rude and violent, through the summer months, flows with a gentle current. Everybody has been somewhere and has acquired a new tinge of brightness from the experiences of an autumn tour. There has been an interval in the intercourse, even of those whose haunts lie closest to each other, which gives a welcome aroma of freshness to a meeting. The *raconteur* has evolved a new crop of stories, the philosopher a fresh theory of the universe, the professional beauty an unimagined costume. One man has annexed a virgin island, another has invented a new religion. Human society, flaccid from the monotonous labours of the season, responds gratefully to the tonic of freshly culled gossip and newly conceived ideas.

The effect is heightened by the circumstance that the English climate has reached its climax of uncompromising badness. A London November will stand no nonsense from people who make an impertinent pretence of enjoying it, or who apologise for it as healthy. It will contribute neither to enjoyment nor to health. Nothing pleasant is

to be had anywhere beyond those comfortable precincts which human art has fortified against an outside world of fog, mud and drizzle. But then the artificial delights of home are all the more delightful for the contrast they offer to Nature's rugged mood.

So Olivia, on returning in the late autumn with the Heriots, found that, despite east winds, seas of mud, and occasional intervals of Egyptian darkness, life was anything but dull. She was getting on capitally with her cousins. The autumn had been a success. Existence with Mrs. Heriot—if somewhat below the ideal of existence—was easy, cheerful, comfortable; pleasant enough, at any rate, to quiet any restless promptings to a move. The idea of a return to her uncle's house was more than ever inconceivable. Olivia was young and happy, despite some sad moments, when she contrasted her present surroundings with happier hours with her father or the choicer pleasures of Lady Heriot's society. These were better than anything now within her reach. They belonged to a vanished world, which it was sweet to dream of, to cherish in loving, pious reminiscence. Olivia herself had passed into a new phase of existence; she had enlarged her horizon; she was stirred by new tastes, impulses, aspirations. But her old self and her old inclinations were still alive, and now and again forced themselves to light in unexpected outbursts of waywardness. 'You must not be surprised,' she once said to her cousin, 'at anything I do. I have something of the Bohemian in me, and something of the Puritan. You will see I shall break loose some day and go back to my Bohemianism. You will never tame me into a young lady of fashion.'

Despite her regrets of Bohemianism, Olivia took kindly to her new home and her new life. She fully verified all Mrs. Heriot's predictions as to her aptitude for society, and the impression she would make on the sensibility of mankind. Mankind and womankind were equally impressed. Her unstudied attitudes had a refined beauty of their own, all the more striking for its complete unconsciousness. Her face, the faithful mirror of each passing mood—mirth,

pathos, enthusiasm, interest—was exquisite in all. Everybody wanted to talk to her; everybody was interested in her: all admired. Mrs. Heriot was charmed at the pronounced success of her experiment; and already let her fancy wander in happy exultancy down a long vista of delightful possibilities.

Parliament was not sitting, and De Renzi had gone for a holiday to Vienna. Soon after Christmas he returned. Olivia, coming down into the drawing-room late one afternoon, found him established by Mrs. Heriot's tea-table, and enjoying the privileges of a confidential chat. The conversation broke off abruptly as she entered, in a manner that suggested to Olivia that the talk had been about herself.

'I am delighted,' De Renzi said, 'to hear that you have come to London for something more than a visit—to tantalise and disappear as you did last season. Mrs. Heriot has been telling me. It is one of her most brilliant ideas. You will enjoy society, I think; and society, I am positive, will enjoy you.'

'My cousin has been telling me,' Mrs. Heriot said, 'that she is a Bohemian and will never be tamed into liking society.'

'Happy Bohemia!' cried De Renzi. 'The most charming country in Europe and the most necessary! As for society, how can any one profess to like it? Miss Hillyard and I are quite agreed on that and everything. We settled our agreement at the Pines last Christmas.'

'I fancied that we had disagreed,' said Olivia.

'You have forgotten,' answered De Renzi, 'you converted me.'

'What an achievement!' said Mrs. Heriot. 'I did not know that you were convertible—by woman's arguments at any rate.'

'Well,' said De Renzi, 'I was converted. The only society that is worth having is the society of friends whom one sincerely admires. That is why I am so fond of coming here.'

'It is very nice of you to come so soon,' said Mrs. Heriot.

'You must let me come often,' said De Renzi. 'These winter evenings were made expressly for society in my sense of the word — in *our* sense of it. They are worth all your summer sunsets. The muffin boy's bell is the Londoner's nightingale, and how full of poetry. I met one as I came here.'

'That reminds me,' said Mrs. Valentine; 'we have got a splendid muffin to-day. You must try it.'

De Renzi soon justified his definition of society. He constantly made his appearance at tea-time. He was always available for dinner, sometimes when the Heriots were alone, sometimes on state occasions, sometimes when one or two familiar guests added merriment without formality to an unceremonious repast. In each and all he was a valuable addition. He gave a tone; he made an impression; he flashed with joyous arrogance. He shot his bolts of satire with a careless hand; his colleagues, his superiors, his opponents, each in turn were held up in an absurd light for the amusement of his neighbour or the table as the chance might be.

As before in London and at the Pines, Olivia found his presence a marked addition to the agreeableness of existence. He was always kind, always devising kindnesses. It is no inconsiderable kindness to amuse one, and De Renzi was always amusing. Olivia enjoyed his society all the more that it could be enjoyed in safety. He was the sort of companion for whom just now she felt inclined. A companion who was everything rather than sentimental. She was in no mood for sentiment, or the sentimental aspects of life. She had turned away from them; or rather, they seemed to have faded out of her existence. All that was most dear and sacred to her seemed gone. Her father and Lady Heriot, the two main influences of her earlier life, could influence no more except by the spells of remembrance which grew weaker day by day. Her home and her home life had become a dream of the past.

The happy days at Huntsham were gone for ever; no such days could come again. And Jack Heriot! It was all very well for Lady Heriot to preach that Jack and

Olivia could never be anything but friends — that the attempt to be anything more could lead only to disappointment, disaster. It was true, Olivia could not but admit; but it was a bitter truth. She had bowed to the stern decree of fate, of what people called duty; she admitted it as inevitable; she had given up her girlish dream. The sacrifice had been made; but it had cost her more than she had expected. She had renounced the idea of Jack as a lover; but it is one thing to renounce an idea, another to forget it. Olivia had achieved the renunciation, but not all her fortitude would save her, now and then, from a sharp pang of regret. She was facing the world now in some bitterness of spirit. The love which might—which, in a properly constituted world, would—have been hers was forbidden. She felt disinclined for any other. Some day she would have to marry. So Mrs. Heriot preached to her, so others practised. It would befall her as other girls; it was the common lot. But it would be a marriage—such as are contracted every day—of expediency, not of romance; it would free her from dependence on Mrs. Heriot, on whom she could not indefinitely depend. It would be expected of her—the obvious, indeed the only way of disposing of herself. It would be her fate. Naturally she did not feel in the least hurry for it to befall her.

Olivia was, however, completely in the dark about De Renzi. He was, in truth, deeply impressed. He was touched; he knew now that he had never been touched before. Olivia had surprised him into an unaccustomed mood. He had seen women whose personal beauty took the world by storm; women whose conversation seemed a blaze of wit; gifted women, with whom culture and experience had carried the natural gift of fascination to finished lengths of completeness. He had felt their power, but none had ever touched his heart. Was it certain that he had one? The world around him, blindly judging from his cynical language, opined that he had not. De Renzi had sometimes doubted; but he doubted no more. People often become aware of their organs when they begin to hurt them through disease.

In this way De Renzi now learnt for the first time that he had a heart, by a decided heartache. He was the cynic no more. Incredible as it seemed to himself, incredible as it would appear to society—he was in love.

Being in love, choosing to marry for love, not for any of the solid advantages which a judiciously selected marriage brings, was not a contingency for which the family philosophy of the De Renzis had hitherto had any occasion to provide. It had not occurred, even in thought, to any of them. Sir Raphael, head of the clan, had married a million—the parent of future millions. His wife, besides some solid masses of invested wealth, opened the door, through her connections, to various fresh sources of gold. The two married daughters had made distinguished rather than opulent alliances; but the splendour paid. Claude's *rôle* in life had, from the first, been understood. He was to marry a million if he wished to be a millionaire; and he had every chance of doing so. His father would do all that a good father should in supplying his necessities meanwhile and giving him a prolonged series of splendid opportunities. Claude de Renzi might enjoy a golden youth for as long as he pleased, always, of course, construing 'long' with an eye to reasonable people's ideas of length. He was welcome to enjoy his opportunities of splendour on a lavish scale. He was to look about him, to view the world from its vantage posts of wealth and influence. He need grudge himself nothing. He might quaff the rich sparkling cup of pleasure; but he was to remember that business is, after all, the end of life. He was to turn his opportunities to good account; he was to settle down, at last, to a fortune—English, American, or what he pleased, so long as it was huge; and that 'at last,' De Renzi's father had more than once hinted to him, was not to be too long delayed.

De Renzi had accepted his *rôle*, as far at least as leading an extravagant and pleasurable existence was concerned. He was on the best of terms with a variety of women. He had played round more than one delicious bait; he had looked wistfully at several golden opportunities; but the

opportunities had passed unused. It had never seemed certain that the final moment for action had arrived, that something still better might not be had.

Sir Raphael was a man of infinite capacity for waiting. He never hurried. He never wished those in whom he was concerned to hurry. So Claude had been allowed to take his time, and, year after year, had deferred the decisive crisis of his life.

Now a mood of quite another order had befallen him, a mood which would involve the abandonment of a life-long policy, of the family traditions, of the tacit bargain between his father and himself.

He loved this penniless girl in a way in which love had never revealed itself to him before—a violent, passionate, reckless vehemence, that chafed wildly at every check, that banished the habitual feeling of self-possession, calmness, the cold-blooded faculty of managing mankind. Olivia, it was certain, was adorable. De Renzi's feelings quickened to a passion of enthusiasm when it became apparent that she was by no means anxious to be adored.

CHAPTER XXVI

JACK MAKES THE RUNNING

'What say you to the lady? Love is not love,
When it is mingled with respects that stand
Aloof from the entire point. Will you have her?
She is herself a dowry.'

ISABELLA HERIOT, calmly surveying the situation and taking observations on her domestic chart, noted accurately how matters stood, and had a shrewd suspicion of De Renzi's feelings and of the further measures which were necessary to bring about a happy *dénouement.* Love is an affair full of anxious fear, not only to the immediate subjects of the passion, but to those who stand by and watch the conflicting currents of emotion and interest, and the perilous journey of desirable projects to successful accomplishment. It was a perilous passage indeed which Mrs. Heriot had now to watch, and, if possible, to influence. De Renzi was certainly impressed with a strong sense of Olivia's delightfulness. If his feelings only had to be reckoned with, no difficulty need be anticipated. He would certainly travel loyally in the path which affection traced for him. But strong counter influences, social and domestic, Mrs. Heriot surmised, would be brought to bear. How would De Renzi behave under these influences? Was he of the sturdy stuff which opposition only kindles to a warmer mood and a more determined resolve? Or would he succumb? Would he falter? Would he let this prize, which took his fancy so much just now, slip from his grasp when he found it was not to be had without a struggle, without painful con-

test? The fish was hooked, firmly hooked, but it was not landed, and there is always some room for anxiety as to how the hooked fish will behave. He may succeed in breaking frantically away; he may get under a rock and sulk; he may maintain a long and desperate struggle and yield only from exhaustion. How was De Renzi going to behave? Momentous problem, and defying solution by feminine ingenuity! Victory was priceless; but was victory to be achieved? The hostile forces were formidable in numbers, equipment and tactics. The crisis was acute—no reinforcement could be spared. In what direction could Mrs. Heriot look for reinforcement or alliance?

An alliance presented itself from a quarter — *quâ minimé reris*—in the person the least disposed of any one in the world to abet a project of Mrs. Heriot's. It was one of the fortunate accidents which combined to give her a comforting assurance that she was born under a lucky star. The new ally was no other than Jack Heriot. He had not been near his uncle and aunt for ages. He shared his father's wrath with the one, his antipathy to the other. Not even the attraction of meeting Olivia would tempt him from his unswerving hostility. He nursed his resentment even against Olivia. She was in the enemy's camp. She was an enemy. It was inevitable. That she should be so was only one more instance of the hopelessly perverse misarrangement of human affairs. It was, perhaps, just as well, prudence whispered. Yes; but none the less grievous to endure. She would be spoilt, as so many women are; probably she was spoilt already. All dreams of happiness, in which she figured as chief personage—and what other dreams were possible? must be renounced. So Jack Heriot's soul was darkened by an angry mood. 'To be wroth with one we love doth work like poison in the brain.' Jack was very wroth and very much in love.

Olivia, too, cherished some resentment. It was discourteous, unkind, cruel of Jack to banish himself from the house where, he knew, such a friend as she was could be found, when he knew that she was living amongst comparative strangers, in need, as he might be sure, of a friend's

companionship. Love, indeed, between them was impossible; its impossibility had been tacitly agreed upon. It was not to be; so the Fates had decreed; but friendship, kindness, the common courtesies of life, the ties of old recollection, of early sympathies, of childhood's joys and sorrows shared together—who had obliged Jack to turn his back on these? Who had asked him to shut himself off from his uncle and aunt, and thus from the person who formed one of their household? Mrs. Heriot had taken an opportunity of expressing her own views as to Jack, and of ascertaining Olivia's. Jack, she observed, was behaving like his father's son, with irrational and obstinate rudeness and ingratitude. His uncle had done all that he could for him, had found him an excellent business, which would by this time have been making him a rich man. Jack's way of receiving his uncle's kindness had been truly Heriotic—stupid rejection, an insolent behaviour ever since—a determination to have nothing to do with the only practicable scheme for his advancement—with the only people in the world who were willing and able to help him. 'He prefers, I suppose,' Isabella said, 'to help himself in the simplest way he can—the only way he can—he is to marry money.'

'I know,' Olivia had answered with some asperity; 'Lady Eugenia had told me all about it. It is a pity, is it not? that men should have to do it. I do not envy him the necessity.'

'My dear child,' said Mrs. Heriot with emphasis, 'your necessity is just the same; you must provide for yourself, if you please. I shall marry you in good time to a fortune. You will have to submit; if you are wise you will submit with a good grace.'

At these moments Olivia looked like anything rather than submission. 'We will not quarrel about that, Isabella,' she had said, 'till the time comes. Please remember that your fortune must be young, beautiful, charming—adorable, in fact—or I will not look at him; and please put him off as long as possible. I can bear the idea of him at a distance; but at present I should break into rebellion the first moment he came near me. My heart is hardening. In another two seasons I shall be sufficiently petri-

fied. As to Jack Heriot, I repeat my lamentation. He belongs to my romantic past. He is charming; it is a pity that he has to go fortune-hunting. If he were as charming as he seems I should think he would not do it. Perhaps he will not, after all.'

'But he certainly must and will,' said Mrs. Heriot, 'unless he wants to repeat his father's dismal existence, and I suspect that he has seen enough of that. But you speak warmly. You liked him, did you not?'

'I did,' said Olivia; 'we were great friends as children, and childishly affectionate; it was a nursery flirtation; it is all at an end. We are discreet young people, and have forgotten each other, as completely as our wisest friends could wish. He has taken good care not to revive inconvenient recollections, has he not?'

Such being the mood of the several parties concerned, it was a matter of general embarrassment when, one evening, when Mrs. Heriot and Olivia had escaped from a hot drive to take refuge under the trees in the park, Jack suddenly came upon them—too suddenly to admit of retreat on either side. Escape was impossible. In another instant Jack's desire to escape was gone. One look was enough to tell him that remembrance had drawn but a feeble, inadequate picture of Olivia's charms. She was more fresh, more beautiful, more radiant, more altogether exquisite than he had fancied in his dreams about her. It was more than human stoicism could achieve to turn away, graceless and unbending, from so delightful an opportunity, so enchanting a companion. What face was there in all that crowd of pretty women—among all the pretty women that Jack's incursions into polite society had revealed to him—that could compare with this one? After a few bungling sentences of hesitation, Jack consented to be detained. Olivia flushed with pleasure and surprise. 'We have not seen you for an age,' said Mrs. Heriot with cordiality. 'Where have you been hiding, Jack, and why do you never come to see us? Come and sit by us now, and make your excuses if you can.'

Jack had no excuses to offer; he took an empty chair that was next to Olivia's. Mrs. Valentine was exces-

sively gracious, quite ignored Jack's past defaults and un amiable demeanour, and talked with so much good nature that Jack, despite his treasured grievances, his stern resolutions, could not, without absolute savagery, refuse to be good natured. The fact was that Mrs. Heriot had made up her mind that the moment had arrived when Jack might be of use. Claude de Renzi's ardour needed a little stimulant; and what stimulant more effective than the presence of a rival? We admire a lovely flower—we praise its delicate hues, its exquisite fragrance, and are content to admire it on its stalk; but when another's hand is stretched to pick it our admiration becomes active, practical; we want to pick it for ourselves. De Renzi had now admired the flower long enough; a rival was needed. Jack, moreover, had the advantage of being a dummy rival. Isabella knew that he had promised his father that there should be no love-passages between Olivia and himself; Jack's word was his bond. He might, accordingly, be safely allowed to do a little innocent love-making by way of a hint to De Renzi that lovely flowers are intended not only to be admired but to be picked. So Mrs. Heriot was affability itself. It was agreeable to her to reflect, while she was thawing the ice of her nephew's refractory mood, that De Renzi had arranged to join them in the park that evening, and in a few minutes would be on the spot to receive the first instalment of the infection which Mrs. Heriot considered proper for his case.

De Renzi presently made his appearance, greeted the two ladies, Jack observed, with an air which said that such meetings were of frequent occurrence, and atoned by a friendly recognition for his first look of surprise at finding Jack with them. He subsided at once into the chair which Mrs. Valentine had for some time past been defending on his behalf against sundry attempts at invasion. But it was in vain that Mrs. Heriot used her every art to make conversation flow. Four people seated in a row may, in some circumstances, enjoy themselves, but if they are at cross purposes, and each is inspired by a different aim, they are likely to make each other uncomfortable. On the present occasion the party was anything but harmonious. De

Renzi was secretly indignant at his seat by Olivia being occupied. Jack was haunted by the reflection that he was not showing the obduracy which he ought; Olivia was constrained, embarrassed, and grieved at heart. Jack was not being as kind and sympathetic as he ought—as she had expected that he would be. He had neglected her for months; he seemed now not especially delighted to have met her. De Renzi, she knew, had come by appointment to meet them, and would be vexed not to have them to himself. He was doing his best to be agreeable to Mrs. Heriot, to them all; but it was a poor attempt. How different from his merry mood when there was no one with them but himself, or when he brought with him some congenial spirit who abetted his efforts to keep her cousin and herself well amused!

Mrs. Heriot, who was an adroit tactician and keenly sensitive to her own and her neighbour's discomfort, lost no time in effecting a diversion. 'It is growing cooler,' she said; 'suppose we go for a stroll. You shall lead the way, Jack. Come Mr. de Renzi.'

'Jack Heriot!' said De Renzi, as soon as he and Mrs. Valentine dropped far enough behind for a separate conversation, 'I had forgotten his existence. I knew him at Oxford, when we used to go hunting together. An excellent rider! Does he live in London? I never meet him anywhere. Do you often see him?'

'He is Valentine's nephew,' said Mrs. Heriot, evading her companion's inquiry, 'and heir-apparent of the Heriot dynasty. He is revolutionary and philanthropical, and worships art. As an artist in search of the picturesque he is naturally devoted to my cousin. It is an old devotion.'

'How interesting!' said De Renzi in a low tone of nonchalance, 'and the devotion is mutual, no doubt?'

'How can I tell?' said Mrs. Heriot; 'it might easily become so. You see how charming they both are. Olivia is highly impressible, and Jack Heriot is said to be impressive. But the impressions that young people mutually make and receive are beyond calculation, beyond *my* powers of calculation at any rate.'

De Renzi looked suddenly round at Mrs. Heriot and scanned her, as though endeavouring to divine her real meaning. For the moment it eluded him. Was Mrs Heriot telling the simple truth? Was she intending to give him a hint of the existence of a dangerous rival? Did she wish to prick his flagging purpose? For once De Renzi was bewildered. 'Such things are incalculable, of course,' he said; 'it was impertinent of me to ask; my excuse must be that Miss Hillyard always interests me immensely.'

'Does she?' said Mrs. Heriot. 'Well, I sympathise with you. I think her the most interesting girl I have ever known.'

Meanwhile matters were not going smoothly with Jack and Olivia. Their moods were out of tune. To her life wore its brightest, most attractive, most caressing look. The flowing cup of its pleasures was at her lips. She drank, and drank again, charmed with the intoxicating draught. She was too young, too inexperienced, too excited to gauge the true worth of a hundred pleasant objects tendered for her delight—a hundred flattering speeches, flattering acts. For the world just now was being very kind to Olivia, and Olivia in return was grateful to the world, and thought it much maligned. She was in no mood for Jack's tirades against society, society which was so gracious, so kindly, so enjoyable.

Jack, on the other hand, was in a rage with himself, with his lot, with destiny, with the hopeless unattainability of the sweet things of life. His heart was aching for the sweet young creature beside him. He felt a bitterness at the gay, prosperous, comfortable, beautifully dressed, pleasure-seeking, chattering world around him. All spoke of ease, pleasure, luxury, happiness. Why was there none for him? Why was he denied the woman he loved? Why was nature to be trampled on? What were these rules of prudence which crushed young loves, young hearts; which ignored every sentiment of nature? Why could he not take this beautiful woman by the hand, with a loving compulsion lead her away from the crowd, and breathe his tale of passion, of love, and claim her as his own? That would be the right thing,

the natural, the happy thing for all concerned. Why was it impossible? Why was not Jack to live his life, to taste the sweet cup of happiness, of love, as well as others? What right had his father to exact such a promise? What right had life to make such a promise necessary? So Jack was in an angry, heart-sore, rebellious mood, half desperate with vexation, ready to be vexed anew. 'I should have been to see you before,' he said, 'but——'

'But what?' said Olivia; 'I thought it so unkind.'

'Unkind!' cried Jack; 'unkind from me to you! I have been away at Rome studying my profession and learning to become a Bohemian.'

'And I,' said Olivia, 'am being cured of my Bohemianism. I am being educated, I believe, into a young woman of fashion.'

'So I see,' said Jack. 'You do credit to your education.'

There was something in Jack's tone that seemed rude, bitter, and unlike himself.

'What do you mean?' Olivia asked, with something of a reproachful tone. 'Am I changed?'

'Yes,' said Jack, 'changed into an extremely smart young lady. My excellent aunt is a proficient in smartness. That is why I love her so.'

'Why do you talk like that?' said Olivia. 'Perhaps it is *you* who are changed.'

'Yes,' said Jack, 'I am changed. I am a working man now—an artist, a toiler, a socialist, one of the masses. I have no right to be here among all you smart people. They put me in prison last year for defending one of my fellow-workmen against a policeman. You see I am quite disreputable. You ought not to walk with me. When your education is completed you will not.'

'You know that I will!' cried Olivia in indignation. 'You are changed indeed if you can believe it of me. I am your friend, your old friend——'

'Ah, but,' said Jack, 'old friends make room for new. De Renzi, I suppose, is often with you.'

'He is,' said Olivia with dignity. 'He is a great friend of my cousin's. He often comes.'

'Ah,' said Jack with intention.

Olivia thought that her companion was behaving odiously. Had he grown odious? It was a relief when at the end of the row they found the carriage awaiting them.

'Shall we drop you at the House, Mr. de Renzi?' Mrs. Heriot said. 'Good-bye, Jack; and come and see us soon.'

Olivia gave him her hand without a word. She was wounded, vexed, disappointed. De Renzi and the two ladies drove away, talking and laughing gaily.

Poor Jack prolonged a solitary stroll. The world was very dark to him.

That evening Mrs. Heriot took Olivia to a ball. De Renzi arrived late, and soon made his way to them. He found Olivia in the full swing of girlish enjoyment—excited, radiant, more beautiful than ever. She was in great request. She was pledged for a hopelessly long list of dances. For the rest of the evening she was unattainable. De Renzi could only look and silently admire. Critical eyes bent searchingly upon her could discern nothing to disparage; admiring eyes followed her as she moved about, a dream of brightness, of grace, of gaiety. De Renzi stood by Mrs. Heriot and watched the scene. He saw that in a room full of lovely women there was no loveliness like hers—so unstudied, so refined, so perfect—no woman of whom a man might feel prouder to be the chosen worshipper. The world was at her feet, and she moved like a young goddess in more than human perfection, the ideal of triumphant loveliness. 'Your cousin is looking beautiful to-night,' he said, 'more charming than ever.'

'So people seem to think,' said Mrs. Heriot.

De Renzi was silent for some seconds—momentous seconds, for in them the die was cast: his fate was sealed. A sudden pang of jealousy shot burning into his soul. Was this exquisite creature to escape him? Was another hand to secure this peerless prize? De Renzi was betrayed into a tremendous indiscretion. He turned suddenly to Mrs. Heriot. 'Am I too late?' he asked.

His companion was busy with a disordered flower in her

bouquet. She continued leisurely to arrange it to her taste. At last she looked up and met De Renzi's eyes awaiting her reply.

'No,' she said, 'but I should imagine that you have no time to lose.'

CHAPTER XXVII

THE DIE IS CAST

'She's beautiful, and therefore to be wooed ;
She is a woman, therefore to be won.'

ISABELLA HERIOT'S philosophy of life enabled her to explain almost everything, but Olivia's hesitation in accepting De Renzi's proposal appeared to her absolutely inexplicable. Such an offer seemed the crowning summit of human felicity. What greater bliss could a girl, in her wildest dream of happiness, desire? No amount of perverseness short of fatuity could account for an instant's reluctance to close with so splendid a chance. Wealth and position, such as Claude de Renzi would confer on his wife, had often to be purchased by a sacrifice of taste and sentiment. There were some owners of splendid names or colossal fortunes whom no girl out of Bedlam could refuse, but yet whose physical exterior or mental qualities were such as could hardly be accepted without an effort. In some cases the effort hardly fell short of heroism. There were splendid marriages where it was in vain to pretend that a romantic girl could find in the bridegroom the lawful master of her heart. There were always girls with nerve enough to undertake such husbands if they got the chance. Some people might not envy their lot. But in Claude de Renzi's case there were none of these drawbacks. He was conspicuously agreeable. He was the idol of several admiring circles; he was the particular friend of many ladies whose friendship was a rare distinction; he was delightful companion; his good looks were undeniable; he

was the 'glass of fashion and the mould of form—the observed of all observers.' On what ground was it conceivable that Olivia should hesitate in accepting this splendid aggregate of perfections?

Yet Olivia showed a strange hesitation. She came in great perturbation to tell her cousin about her interview with her lover. She had given no answer to De Renzi's vehement protest of attachment, except that she was quite unprepared for it.

'Unprepared!' cried her cousin in astonishment? 'How could you possibly be that? Have you not known for months past that he has been making love to you, assiduous love?'

'No, indeed,' said Olivia; 'I have not; and, what is more, I do not consider that he has. He has amused me, been kind to me, excessively kind and good natured—but love-making! No, I cannot recall any.'

'Perhaps,' said Mrs. Valentine, 'you do not know what it is.'

'Perhaps,' said Olivia, in an unconvinced tone; 'anyhow he has made it now. He loves me. What am I to do?'

'Do?' said Mrs. Valentine, vainly endeavouring to conceal her contempt for such irrational hesitation, 'love him back in return, of course, as you do, Olivia; you know that you do, surely.'

'No,' said Olivia, 'I do not know it; I wish I did. I am taken by surprise. The offer has come too soon, Isabella; I am too young. I told you the truth the other day. I do not wish to marry yet. I cannot. I do not like the idea. Ask him to let the subject drop. Let us be as we were, good friends. Please, Isabella, do this for me.'

Mrs. Heriot's eyes had at times a cold, gray, steely look, which was the reverse of tender. She seemed now to Olivia the incarnation of hard-heartedness. Her face was pale with excitement, with scorn, with anger. Her thin bloodless lips seemed to quiver with lightning-flashes. Yet instinct warned Mrs. Heriot to be self-restrained, to be

gentle. A single false step—a single wrong expression might induce a catastrophe. She assumed a kinder air. 'You are unnerved, Olivia,' she said; 'you are not yourself. You hardly know your own feelings, believe me; how should you? But look into your heart: remember all that has passed, the innumerable kindnesses which Mr. de Renzi has offered and which you have accepted; the open homage he has paid you and which you assuredly have not disliked. Will you now turn round and proclaim to the world that you were amusing yourself merely, that you were trifling, that Mr. de Renzi was being befooled by a coquette? Think twice before you do so grievous a wrong to a man that loves you as he does, before you insult him and disgrace yourself.'

'Disgrace myself!' exclaimed Olivia, turning pale. 'What have I done?'

'You have encouraged him in every possible way,' said Mrs. Valentine with emphasis; 'he has declared himself. What motive can he have but a generous and disinterested attachment? If you reject him you will have been behaving infamously. You always seemed the best of friends.'

'Friends,' said Olivia; 'yes, but marriage; it is too soon, too near! I do not seem to know anything about him.'

'What is it that you want to know and do not?' objected her companion. 'We know everything about him, his position, his family, his prospects, his splendid success. No man in London is more admired or in more request, and he deserves it. You know that he is an old friend of mine.'

'Yes,' said Olivia, 'and that is why I come to you for help. I am in dire need of help, Isabella. I like him of course. How could I not? I admire him; he attracts me, impresses me, dazzles me. He is good-nature itself. But his proposal frightened me, inspired me with a strange reluctance, a sort of terror. Why is it?'

'Why,' cried Mrs. Heriot, 'because you are a little innocent, and have never had a man make love to you before.'

'I am in the dark,' said Olivia. 'He has shown nothing of his real self. I know nothing of him, nor has being

with him helped me to know him. 'What is he, Isabella? To me he is still a mystery, and I am not fond of the mysterious.'

'There is no mystery about him,' Mrs. Valentine said, 'but one which he will be ready enough to explain—his affection for yourself.'

Olivia passed some hours of agitation—self-searching, doubt, hope, fear, perplexity, accesses of heroism, lapses into abject cowardice. She had reduced herself to something like prostration when De Renzi came in the evening to claim another interview and hear her reply. The day's uncertainty had wrought him to an impetuous mood. Olivia's hesitation made him more confident about himself than ever. She was dreadfully frightened, excited, never more bewitchingly beautiful. De Renzi was genuinely affectionate, vehement, extravagant, all that a lover should be. He breathed his passion, his devotion, in no faltering tones. He overpowered objections with enthusiasm, with joyous, hopeful confidence, with tenderness. He was earnest, impassioned. Resistance seemed less and less reasonable, less possible. The inflammable materials of Olivia's nature began to catch the flame.

It is delightful to be loved; De Renzi did all that a lover could to enhance the delightfulness. He had always overpowered her; how was she not to be overpowered now? how was she to resist this strong will, this imperative demand, this masterful nature, that claimed her for his own?

She began to waver; the victorious force pressed hard on her retreat, seized every vantage-ground, carried point after point. At last the day was won.

'You are rash,' Olivia said; 'whatever I say now, you must remember that I was not sure this morning.'

'But I was sure then and I am sure now,' said De Renzi; 'sure enough for both of us.'

'Then,' said Olivia, giving him her hand, 'I will be sure too.'

CHAPTER XXVIII

YOUNG LOVE IN DIFFICULTIES

Geta loq. 'Ille indotatam virginem atque ignobilem
Daret illi? Nunquam faceret.'

De Renzi was delighted with his wooing, with a new sensation, a new experience. He was delighted with Olivia. She had comported herself through the encounter with a dignity and nobleness which enhanced her worth a thousand times. Her unaffected surprise at his proposal, her hesitation in accepting it, the reluctance that had struggled long and had to be mastered, as it were, sword in hand—all these sent her up enormously in her lover's scale of feminine excellence, made love's assurance doubly sure, convinced him, more cogently than ever, that his worship was being paid at a deserving shrine. Everything in Olivia was, in fact, adorable—the loftiness of soul, the courageous spirit, the quick intelligence, not less than the exquisite form in which all these spiritual treasures were enshrined. De Renzi experienced a thrill of admiration such as he had never felt before. Olivia, he was certain, was incomparable. He knew it; the world would acknowledge it. That she should be his prize was but in that eternal order of things which had decreed that his path should run from one glittering summit to another in the flowery uplands of success.

Great victories are costly. The cost of this would, De Renzi knew, be serious. There would be a bad quarter of an hour with his father. He had reckoned on this, but it looked less pleasant as the moment of collision approached.

Sir Raphael was self-willed, unconciliatory, vindictive. He could be very nasty to those who disappointed his hopes or crossed his will. He would, De Renzi knew, be very nasty to him about his marriage. Sir Raphael had quite other schemes in his mind for his son's advancement in life. Claude had known of these schemes; had, on the strength of them, enjoyed a long youth of pleasure, had been for several years fluttering about London drawing-rooms, when, otherwise, he might have been buried among ledgers, invoices, and bills of lading in a counting-house at Odessa or Chicago. He had been treated—as Sir Raphael liked to treat those who transacted business with him, so long as they did what he wished—with generous profusion. No member of London's golden youth had had his gold more thickly laid on or more abundantly renewed. The time had now arrived for Claude de Renzi to fulfil his part of the bargain. Several eligible alliances had been suggested which would have satisfied the father, which could not reasonably dissatisfy the son. Claude, however, had hesitated in fulfilling his duty, was now about to make its fulfilment impossible. He would have got the best of the bargain. Sir Raphael seldom invested in hatred: it is not a paying investment; he could, when expedient, forgive and forget; but the man who got the better of him in a bargain was unforgivable. Sir Raphael hated such a man, and would crush him remorselessly on the first opportunity. Claude de Renzi had frequently seen his father crush people. He felt no desire to experience the process; yet if his father chose, how easily might the husband of a penniless girl be crushed!

The interview proved worse than De Renzi had depicted it in anticipation. Sir Raphael's very demeanour —unimpassioned, cynical, business-like—seemed to damn his son's case before he opened it. As well hope to melt Mephistopheles with a tale of tender hearts and youthful innocence. As the disclosure proceeded Sir Raphael looked at his son, at first with surprise, then with real amusement. 'Well,' he said, as Claude's story came to a close, 'you want me to forbid it, of course. I do so in

the most peremptory manner, with the most uncompromising severity. You are to blame, my dear Claude, very much to blame. You are excessively unprincipled. I am much displeased. I forbid you, on pain of my eternal displeasure, to have a word more to say to the young woman. Write and tell her so at once, and say how sorry you are. Will that get you out of the scrape? or shall I send you off on an important negotiation to the Antipodes? I will do so with pleasure. When would you like to go?'

'You misunderstand me,' said De Renzi. 'I am in earnest. It is not an escape from an entanglement that I am seeking, but your consent to a marriage which is essential to my happiness. The young lady——'

'Is a paragon, of course,' said his father. 'They always are. Don't trouble yourself, Claude, or waste my time and your own in describing her charms; I can imagine them. Still less try to persuade me to help you in a boy's folly—I don't wish to be rude to you—but a boy's folly which I am surprised that you of all men should contemplate, and which, assuredly, I will never abet, will never allow.'

'You are peremptory, sir,' said Claude, 'and not too polite. Miss Hillyard is a lovely and distinguished young lady. She moves in a brilliant circle, and adorns it. She is a connection of the Goldinghams, whom you know. She is Mrs. Heriot's *protégée*, and is the greatest beauty of the day. I am determined to marry her. I beg you not to oppose an arrangement which is indispensable to my happiness, and from which I cannot go back without dishonour.'

'Forgive me,' said his father, 'I am pressed for time, so, no doubt, are you. Do not let us waste any more. You cannot waste it more effectually than by talking about dishonour and trying to argue me into approving what I condemn as the height of unwisdom. You know my views, Claude, perfectly. They are unchangeable.'

'Then you forbid it, sir?' asked De Renzi.

'I have no right to do that,' said his father, 'nor do I; but, if I do not hear of your engagement being broken off within the next twenty-four hours, I shall stop the allowance

which assists you, perhaps has encouraged you, in a course of extravagances of which this is the climax; and I shall request you to take charge of some small interests of our House which require personal supervision at Buenos Ayres. The climate is delightful; the voyage will brace you. My confidential clerk will give you all particulars better than I can. You will start on Tuesday. Good-morning.'

The De Renzis were not an affectionate family, nor was Claude de Renzi a habitual frequenter of his home, if, indeed, the frigidly gorgeous mansion in which Lady de Renzi dispensed her hospitalities deserved that comfortable appellation. Still the outbreak of hostilities between father and son was too serious an occurrence to be kept concealed. The consciousness of a domestic crisis pervaded the household with a sense of awe. Sir Raphael came home with the especial air of Mephistophelian politeness which bespoke to his wife and daughters a vengeful mood and a contemplated atrocity. Meanwhile Claude had explored the tender recesses of his mother's heart. Lady de Renzi sympathised completely with her husband's objections, but her opposition was more adroit. She objected with *finesse*. Claude was the strong card of the family and must be played to the best advantage. It would be a misfortune to them all if his parliamentary career were interrupted, his excellent position in society abandoned, and a thousand ties that bound him, and through him his relations, to all the good things in life rudely snapped. His presence kept a brilliant, a successful De Renzi for ever before the world. He shed glory around him. His triumphs redounded to the family credit. To ruin him would be a lamentable waste of family strength. To send such a man to mingle with ship-agents and bill-brokers on the wrong side of the Atlantic would be to throw away a splendid chance. The old vulgar expedient of the self-willed father, who curses the refractory son and turns him out of the house, was as obsolete as the flint hatchets and megatheria of the infant world. Conciliation was essential. Claude was as determined as his father, as long-sighted, as patient when patience was necessary for achievement, as unscrupulous

when scruples stood in its way. He would never give in. If he succumbed it would be after a struggle which would make victory expensive; if he fell he would drag down as much as possible with him in his fall. Peace must, Lady de Renzi perceived, be effected; but the worst chance of reconciliation just then was to attempt it. Lady de Renzi had not been married thirty years to her husband for nothing. She watched the Mephistophelian smile—herald of tempestuous weather, watched and held her peace. All things come, she knew, to those who have learnt the precious art of how to wait, amongst other things, the opportunity of shaping her husband's conduct in the right direction. Lady de Renzi had learnt the invaluable rule that a wife who wishes to govern should never answer, still less argue, till a husband cools.

CHAPTER XXIX

STUCCO CARRIES THE DAY

'Hast thou attempted greatness? Then go on.
Back-turning slackens resolution.'

FORTUNE who favours the brave is accustomed also to smile on the dexterous. It was now Mrs. Heriot's lot to exemplify the close connection between good luck and dexterity. De Renzi had confided to her the opposition which the announcement of his marriage was provoking in his family circle, and the uncomfortable predicament in which his father's peremptory declaration placed him. He showed a manly spirit of resistance. 'Of course,' he said, 'I shall win the day. I always do. I feel no apprehension on that score, but the quèstion is how to win it most easily. The point in a family victory is, not the winning it, but the winning it with as little bloodshed as possible.'

'Perhaps I can help you to a bloodless victory,' said Mrs. Valentine, 'but please to remember that, so far as we are concerned, you are under no obligation to win it at all. You have but to say the word. Olivia is greatly attached to you; a breach would, of course, grieve her: but if anything should lead to a change in your feelings, or your family difficulties should make it necessary to defy them, she would, I am certain, wish you to be free, or, rather, would insist on your being so.'

De Renzi broke out with a burst of passion. 'What do you take me for? Mrs. Heriot, fool or traitor? Do you think that I do not know my own mind, or that I will allow anything—least of all my father's opposition, which I

regard as a mere impertinence—to interfere with my decision, my devotion, my unwavering, unalterable devotion to Olivia? No; I have won her; it is the achievement of my life. I love her. I worship her. I have vowed to marry her, and, by Heaven, marry her I will, though all the fathers and mothers in Christendom are in arms to oppose it.'

'A good lover!' said Mrs. Heriot with cordiality. 'Would that all were as good. Well, now for my scheme of alliance.'

Thereupon Mrs. Heriot proceeded to inform De Renzi of certain matters which had been till then deeply buried in the breasts of a few individuals, immediately concerned, but in which her companion began at once to feel a vivid interest.

Mr. Goldingham's business had been growing from one stage of greatness to another till the glory and the burthen had become too much for a single family. It had been recently determined in a solemn conclave of Goldinghams that the moment had arrived for converting it into a joint stock company. The vastness of the concern, its widespread ramifications, its enormous capital, its promise of splendid dividends, would be sure to impress the public, always on the look out for a new El Dorado. The company would be on a magnificent scale. Fortunes would be made in the process of its birth. It must be launched by a great House, which would be greater still by many hundred thousands of pounds when the operation was complete.

Whose should that great house be? To whom should the splendid, the lucrative task be confided? Into whose coffers should this golden stream descend? Judiciously manipulated it was an affair of half a million at the least. In skilful hands who could say what it might not be capable of producing? Which of the many magnates was to have it? This was the piece of news which Mrs. Heriot conveyed to her companion's attentive ear — this the query which she suggested. Both perfectly realised the situation and understood its bearing on their own family crisis. With the help of this Claude de Renzi might appear before

his father, not a humble suppliant, but as a high negotiating power whom it is impossible to defy and expedient to conciliate. The launching of the company was recognised in Mr. Goldingham's family circle as an opportunity of which much might be made. It would be a plum. Whoever got it would be placed under an enormous obligation.

Mr. Goldingham was not in the habit of obliging people for nothing. Such an occasion ought to mark a bold step in family aggrandisement.

Mrs. Heriot was the person who realised the position most clearly and had most qualifications for carrying out the necessary diplomacy. It had occurred to her that Claude de Renzi's engagement to her ward and kinswoman would be an emphatic declaration to the world that the Goldinghams stood on a splendid height of socio-financial sublimity. They would be allied with the great powers of the money world. Mr. Goldingham approved his daughter's views and lent himself readily to abet her policy. She told him of De Renzi's devotion to Olivia, and suggested that she should be armed with plenary powers for conducting the negotiation. Mr. Goldingham readily enough agreed. It required but little manipulation on Mrs. Heriot's part to invest the offer with a condition upon which Claude de Renzi might insist on his own behalf. With such an offer in his hands he might dictate his own terms.

But bounteous Fortune had further blessings in reserve. Another event about this time paved the way for Claude de Renzi in his diplomatic endeavours to win his mother to his side of the dispute.

The Duke of Egeria was one of the greatest men in England and one of the best judges of a pretty woman. To this interesting judicial process he devoted all the resources of a historical family, a colossal income, a cultivated intellect, a fascinating person. He was a cosmopolitan Mæcenas. His pictures, his library, his gardens, were, each, the despair of rivals, the delight of connoisseurs, the wonder of mankind. For public life he showed a cynical contempt. Politics, which ought to be a recreation for gentlemen and a science for philosophers, had become

a mere scramble for the goodwill of the mob, which, with each new dose of power, becomes more self-asserting, rapacious and tyrannical. Each aspirant to power provides a fresh scheme of spoliation—grosser, more flagrant, more scandalous than the last. The tide is rolling in amain, it will submerge us all. In the meantime the only rational thing to do is to await the deluge with equanimity, and to close the chapter of civilisation with an ornate and luxurious page—in other words, to collect all the most admirable things that money will buy, and invite all the prettiest women in Europe to come and admire them.

When it was known that the Duke of Egeria admired and patronised, the admiration and patronage of the rest of the human race was a matter of course. Claude de Renzi was startled when Mrs. Heriot said calmly, in reply to some proposal of his own for the following Saturday, 'No; that will not do: that is the day we go to Bellevue.'

Now Bellevue was one of the duke's numerous abodes, a palatial villa, near enough to London to make it an easy retreat for a Sunday in the country. To be invited to Bellevue meant a great deal. It was a compliment by which the most critical were pleased, the proudest were flattered. It was the best thing of the sort in England —in the world. The milk of all civilisation had been skimmed to produce a cream so thick, so rich, so exquisite as this.

When Mrs. Heriot received an invitation for herself, her husband, and Olivia, to spend a Sunday at Bellevue she knew what was meant. The apple of Paris had been conferred. Olivia stood on the dizzy heights of greatness, and was carrying her relations along with her in her upward flight. She was receiving homage, which stamped her in the eyes of mankind as worthy of adoration. She had become famous; she might soon become historical. The resources of civilisation were exhausted. Society had no greater bliss to give.

Mrs. Valentine made the announcement and De Renzi received it with the indifference due to an everyday occurrence.

'I am so glad,' De Renzi said, 'because I have been invited there for that Sunday too. We shall be able to amuse each other. The duchess's Sundays are sometimes a little dull.'

The following week several columns of the morning papers were occupied by the Prospectus of 'Goldingham & Company, Limited,' for which the firm of Raphael de Renzi invited subscriptions. The greatest actuaries in London had examined the books of the firm and proved, by reference to past years, the golden prospects of the undertaking. There were vast contracts on hand, which would secure splendid dividends for several years to come. Forthwith there was a rush upon the new company. The Stock Exchange caught the fever; the public went in for a gamble. Long before the letters of allotment were issued fortunes were made and lost in 'Goldinghams.' An attempted combination to run down the project, after impeding its progress for a week, ignominiously collapsed. The battlefield was strewn with prostrate 'bears.' The shares rose daily. Sir Raphael de Renzi and Co. were triumphant. They and their friends made fortunes.

Claude had a venture on his own account, and one morning brought Olivia a cheque for £1000, earned by an allotment which he had secured for her, and which, he told her, was her own, to make ducks and drakes with as she pleased. In the course of these agreeable proceedings Sir Raphael's assent to his son's alliance was announced, and Claude, one afternoon, took Olivia in triumph to tea with Lady de Renzi, to be formally introduced to her new relations.

CHAPTER XXX

IO TRIUMPHE!

'Medio de fonte leporum
Surgit amari aliquid.'

MRS. HERIOT had attained her grand climacteric. Her cup of bliss was full. She had been to Bellevue, had witnessed her *protégée's* apotheosis, and had established a small flirtation with the duke on her own account. In her house, under her superintendence, had been achieved one of the memorable engagements of the season. The most eligible of London bachelors was a safe capture in her drawing-room. She felt towards Olivia as the fortunate owner of a Derby winner to the precious three-year-old that has accomplished that inestimable feat. Mrs. Heriot's horse had justified the prescient wisdom that foresaw success, had proved worthy of the training, the care, the expense, the anxiety which a triumph so sublime involves. For a triumph it was—the greatest, most difficult of all. Nothing remained but to sit at ease, enjoying a delicious sense of successful accomplishment, on glory's golden heights.

Olivia was now surrounded by all the materials of enjoyment in embarrassing profusion. She was among the flesh-pots of Egypt. Her life was full of excitements, amusements, pleasure with rose-crowned brows and a flowing cup; hope, for what might she not now hope in the way of pleasurable existence? Riches mean a great deal to every one; but to a girl of twenty who has known the tight grip of poverty, its ignominious shifts and expedients,

its tedium, its sordid anxieties, its dire necessities, and to whom wealth comes in the delightful guise of homage to personal charm, to whom it comes in the form of a husband —brilliant, admiring, aspiring and with a good right to aspire, ambitious, with the firm, capable, daring step of the man who sees his way to glory—how should not the prospect be bewildering? What time is there in such a life to do more than strive to keep pace with it, to taste each passing pleasure as it flies, to hold one's own with the busy, eager, jostling throng around, to live up to the occasion, to enjoy it as it ought to be enjoyed?

And Olivia had real enjoyment. She was delighted with the world, credulous of its promise of joy. People abused its hollowness, its emptiness, its cruelty, its vulgarity, its disappointed hopes, its uninteresting interests, its tasteless pleasures. What did such people mean? They were the unfortunate surely, the morbid, the cynical, the ill-natured, who could take so sombre, so distorted a view of life—life that smiled at one so invitingly, so caressingly; life so full of kindness, of flattery, homage, friendship, and—as Olivia had now the happiness to experience—of love.

The happiness of love! Was Olivia happy? She assured herself, and everybody assured her, that she was. At any rate she was very much excited, very much interested, deeply stirred by the hopes and passions of the existence that was opening so auspiciously upon her. Admiration is delightful, and Olivia was greatly admired. Many people conspired to tell her that she was beautiful. More than one Society journal had recorded her presence at a fashionable festivity, and detailed her attire and appearance for the delight, emulation, and despair of less fortunate womankind. For Olivia's charm was inimitable. Mrs. Valentine spared no trouble or expense on her cousin's toilette; but all authorities agreed that simplicity was Olivia's most becoming *rôle*. All agreed that her beauty was of an order that needed no fine clothes, and that Olivia, put on what she would, was sure to find it surpassingly becoming. Still De Renzi's bride elect, the con-

spicuous beauty of the hour, must be appropriately dressed, and Olivia's new dresses, as they followed each other with bewildering rapidity, gave her, it may be believed, a series of highly agreeable sensations. She figured in many splendid crowds, and the splendid crowds did not conceal their curiosity and interest. Life, that phase of life, at any rate, which Olivia was now experiencing, was, she felt, one long excitement. But excitement is fatiguing, and Olivia, despite her youth, health, fine animal spirits, and lovely dresses, often—and more often as the season went on and familiarity had dulled the edge of enjoyment—felt dreadfully fatigued. Sometimes, moreover, when she was, perforce, for a short moment at rest, unwelcome visitors would come and knock at her heart's door, and peremptorily claim admission, visitors whom Olivia would fain have ignored. Regret would come, and vague unrest, a sense of dissatisfaction, an undefinable melancholy. Fear came oftenest of all, and knocked the loudest. Of what was she afraid? She knew not, nor why. But she knew that it was so; and fear is none the less fearful because it defies analysis.

Could it be that Olivia was, at heart, dissatisfied with her lover's wooing, and depressed by it? Claude made many protests of admiration, and wearied her by unceasing eulogies of her charms, by prophecies of the social triumphs which awaited her, the impression which her entrance into the world as a bride would create, the paling of inferior luminaries before the excelling star of brightness. 'You meaner beauties of the night,' he would cry,

> '"———that poorly satisfy our eyes
> More by your number than your light,
> You common people of the skies,
> What are you when the moon shall rise?"'

'I don't care about being the moon, thank you,' Olivia said, with a tinge of irritation in her tone, which gave it a serious meaning; 'to begin with it is a satellite, and I hate satellites; and then it is uninteresting, cold, dead, all its volcanoes gone out, nothing but a big ash-heap—I was

reading somewhere—lit up on some nights of the month with borrowed brightness for our express edification.'

'*Your* volcanoes have not gone out at any rate, have they?' her future husband said, taking a mental admiring note of the latent rebellion in the fiery young creature whom he was hereafter to dominate. 'You must forgive a few rhapsodies till our marriage-day at any rate. You do not know how intensely I admire you.'

Olivia repented at once. 'I am ungrateful,' she said; 'forgive me; you make too much of me, Claude, a thousand times too much. I am no better than a hundred others, and not half as good as many. If you are content with me, I am content with myself and my lot; only love me, love me. You will always love me, will you not?'

What meant those appeals to so ardent a protester of devotion? Why did Olivia, after a flood of homage, still feel that she needed something more from her lover? some further expression of love, some tender touch, some look of devotion, some little sign which makes the loving heart rejoice?

The fact is that some men, who are clever enough to do almost anything, and who are believed by the world—themselves included—to be adepts at making love, know not the sacred secrets of that mysterious art. Olivia, at the end of all Claude's protestations, was still haunted by a doubt as to whether her future husband was not laughing at her, at himself, and the romantic relationship which exposed them for a time to the gaze of society in a serio-comic light. It was impossible for a man whose head was so busy with other things to surrender himself to a single dominating passion. De Renzi cared intensely for politics, or, rather, for the success of his party and himself in the political combat. To this he gave all the seriousness of his nature, its gravest thought, its keenest endeavour. His heart was in it; his blood was up; he was resolved to win. It was the great victory of life; it must be achieved at all hazards; to this end all other ends must be subordinate, every other interest, pleasure, sentiment, must give way. This was his real *grande passion.* It left but scanty room for any other.

He had not the leisure for a protracted love-making; nor, had there been leisure, would De Renzi's temperament have inclined him to protract it. Say what he might of his passion, he could not pretend to be absorbed, dominated by it. He was intent on the game of life, and it was hard to snatch a thought for any other subject.

Olivia's opportunities for confidential intercourse with her lover were not abundant. They met constantly; but it was, for the most part, in public; or, at any rate, not in the privacy and quiet congenial to the lover's mood. Mrs. Heriot's house did not lend itself to privacy or to quiet of any sort. She herself treated love-making, when once its practical object was achieved, with the scanty respect due to an obsolete accomplishment. It was an embarrassing necessity, she explained, if Olivia hinted dissatisfaction at her lover's scanty leisure and reticent moods. The unsophisticated classes—the Strephons and Chloes of country life—do it with unblushing frankness. But among ladies and gentlemen the period which two mortals devote to mutual adoration exposes them, more or less, to satirical and amused observation. A man must get through it as best he may, making himself as little ridiculous as possible. The future bride is pleasantly enough situated; she poses as the coy recipient of a thousand flatteries from her future husband and from society at large; she sails in a summer sea and bears her blushing honours thick upon her. But the prospective bridegroom becomes, for the time, a social cypher: he is lost to society; he is of no use for anything but the private idyll of domestic romance. He cannot amuse, he dare not flirt; it would be profane to dance. He is like the victim of some childish malady, which excites no pity and may provoke contempt. The sooner it is over the better, on every account. Meanwhile prudence and self-respect, and a wholesome dread of ridicule from heartless observers, prompt rigorous concealment. To betray sentiment would be ridiculous, and to be ridiculous is the terror even of the courageous. The sensible lover endeavours by a judicious reserve to give ridicule as little scope as possible.

Olivia could not controvert her cousin's doctrines, at any rate did not attempt to do so. Nevertheless the result was not exhilarating. Sentiment is a bird that loves freedom, loves to air itself in the summer light, to sing its heart-felt strain at ease, regardless of the world below. What mattered it, Olivia asked herself, what people thought or said, and whether the ill-natured ones thought fit to be amused? Why was Claude so nervously sensitive to the ridicule of the outer world? What was this society, whose influence forced its way between her lover and herself, chilling the natural outflow of affection with the menace of a sneer? Thus Olivia began to find her time of love-making not so bright, joyous, and unrestrained, as in her girlish fancies she had dreamt that it must be.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE TROUBLES OF COURTSHIP

'I would that you were all to me,
You that are just so much, no more:
Nor yours nor mine, nor slave nor free
Where does the fault lie? What the core
O' the wound, since wound must be?'

DE RENZI'S courtship was not just now a bed of roses to him. He had begun to feel the first chill gusts of the approaching storm. He was feeling already the inconveniences of an unworldly marriage—his father's cynical disapproval, his mother's ill-concealed disappointment, his sisters' uncomplimentary silence about their future relation, the fancied sneers of kind friends at so interesting a lapse into the sentimental. Olivia's reception by his own relations was, De Renzi felt bitterly, a foretaste of the family discomforts which awaited his wife and himself in times to come. They froze her with politeness, which was in the circumstances the acme of discourtesy. They dared not insult her, but their behaviour breathed a subtle insolence. There was no attempt at intimacy; no pretence of the goodwill that will soon ripen into affection. Sir Raphael went his way, Lady de Renzi and the young ladies went theirs; their thoughts were busy; their leisure was small; their days overcrowded with engagements: there seemed no space for Olivia anywhere to find a resting-place, no spot where she could strike a spark of kindness. More than once she had come back from visiting her future relations with ruffled nerves and in an agitated temper, and had expressed herself about them with an outspokenness which

filled Mrs. Heriot's soul with the direst apprehensions. The case was one which baffled her powers of analysis. She could not diagnose, she could not prescribe for it. Olivia's light-heartedness appeared to be deserting her at the very moment when joy, confidence, triumph, ought, as she judged, to be at their highest pitch. She had rallied Olivia sometimes on her melancholy moods, as accidents which naturally befall people who are excessively in love, the mere reaction of overwrought sentiment. Lovers are traditionally a moody, wayward race, who vex their own and each other's souls with groundless alarms, unjust suspicions, imaginary grievances. Comfort, tranquillity, happiness, come only with marriage. And what marriage could promise more happily, more auspiciously than Olivia's?

Once, coming suddenly into Olivia's room, Mrs. Heriot had found her in tears. There was no time for concealment, nor did Olivia attempt it. These exhibitions of waywardness were, to Mrs. Heriot, excessively provoking. They were girlish folly, of which any rational being ought to be heartily ashamed. They deserved rough handling—they required it. How could the bride elect of one of the richest and most brilliant young men in London have any conceivable excuse for crying? Such moods were best combated by a judicious firmness. 'What is the matter now, Olivia?' she asked in a tone that breathed anything rather than sympathy. 'Are you ill, or have you had a lovers' quarrel? What is it you are crying about? You will make yourself a perfect fright.'

Olivia speedily was mistress of herself. 'Was I crying?' she said; 'well, Isabella, perhaps it was because my new relations are so kind to me—that is, if they ever become my relations.'

'If ever they become!' cried Mrs. Heriot in consternation; 'you do not mean to say, Olivia, that you are doubting?'

'Just now,' said Olivia, 'I doubt everything but one, and that is that I dislike Lady de Renzi and her daughters. I am positive of that. I shall always dislike them; they are not likeable.'

'Not likeable?' asked her cousin; 'I like them well enough.'

'Possibly,' said Olivia; 'and so might I, if I was not doomed to become their relation.'

'Doomed!' cried Mrs. Heriot; 'what can you possibly mean?'

'I mean,' said Olivia; 'that it is a misfortune to belong to such people as Lady de Renzi. She is vulgar, worldly, overbearing. As soon as I am married she will begin to tyrannise over me. She dislikes me, and I return the compliment.'

'How can you talk like that, Olivia, even to me?' said Mrs. Heriot. 'Of course, if you have thoughts like that in your mind, Lady de Renzi will dislike you. Fortunately, you are marrying Claude, not his mother.'

'Fortunately,' said Olivia; 'or perhaps unfortunately. Who can tell?'

'What!' cried her companion; 'do you mean that you are doubting about Claude?'

'I am doubting about everything,' said Olivia; 'I doubted when he proposed to me. I am as doubtful now as then—doubtful whether I ought to have accepted him—doubtful if I am the right wife for him—doubtful if he loves me as he ought, or I love him as I ought—doubtful if I can ever be all he will wish for in his wife—doubtful whether I can honestly go on. Isabella, I am miserable, have mercy on me, and help me. What am I to do?'

But there was no mercy to be seen in Mrs. Heriot's cold gray eyes; rather a steady rigidness, a glance of scorn, provocation, resentment. She looked now with steady determination at Olivia; her lips were rigid, her face was like iron, her tones incisive. It was no moment, she was thinking, for hesitation or reserve. The crisis was too acute.

'Olivia,' she said, 'we had better understand each other. I will not be made a fool of; nor, if I can help it, let you make a fool of yourself. You are behaving now like a fool. I will have no such folly here. There must be no backing

out of your engagement, no nonsense about your future relations: you have not got to marry them, nor need you love them or like them, though I should advise you to be as civil to them as you can. But you *have* got to marry Claude de Renzi. You have known him for two years; you have constantly met; you know each other thoroughly; you have never disguised your feelings about him; you loved him a month ago well enough to accept him; it is nonsense to suppose that you do not love him now. Love or no love, you must go on. I will have no jilting in my house, and no playing with the idea of it, as you are doing now. You must be out of your senses to think of it. You know what your position is. I have done everything for you. Thanks to me, you are about to make a splendid match. To throw over such a marriage for a whim—a silly girlish caprice—would be the act of an idiot. You must be an idiot for it even to have occurred to you. There is not a girl in London who does not envy you your good luck. Remember, please, that if you break with Claude you break with me. I shall have nothing more to do with you. You will have to go back to Axborough and teach your cousins arithmetic.'

'I would sooner do that,' cried Olivia, flushing up and looking wild and rebellious, 'than marry a man whom I am not sure of loving. I will do it if needs be.'

'I shall be as good as my word,' said Mrs. Heriot; 'you may rely upon that. But I know you mean to be a good girl, and behave like a rational being. This evening you are overwrought and excited. We are both excited. Do not let us talk about it any more till we are cooler. I have confidence in your good sense.'

The conciliatory close of Mrs. Heriot's harangue had been inspired by Olivia's appearance. She looked like a young rebel angel of a determined order. She had it in her to rebel, it was certain; she would do so unless handled judiciously. So Mrs. Heriot felt that she had been too peremptory, too plain-spoken.

'I wish that I could share your confidence,' said Olivia, 'or that I could feel confident about anything. I wish to

do what is right, Isabella; I mean to do it, cost me what it may. Only please do not drive me.'

Mrs. Heriot began to understand that Olivia, if she was to go in the desired direction, required extremely gentle driving.

CHAPTER XXXII

IT RAINS DIAMONDS

'Il y a bien peu de femmes qui n'aient entrevu le ciel a l'heure de leurs fiançailles, et ne donneraient une partie de leur vie pour l'entrevoir encore.'

THUS Olivia's soul was beginning to drift apart in solitude, tempest-tossed on waves of doubt, carried this way and that by conflicting currents of emotion. On the one side the world was beaming upon her with siren smiles. The incense of homage floated rich and delicious around her. The world was at her feet. If she entered a drawing-room she knew that her presence at once became a force that was felt; men were continually asking to be introduced to her; women were continually inventing excuses to become friends with her. She had a sense—a delightful thrilling sense—of success. Society found her delightful, crowned her with flowers, and led her from one triumph to another. In a few weeks she would be in possession of all in the way of splendour, pleasure, importance that wealth could give. Meanwhile her every whim was law. Claude was always on the look-out for some new way in which he might gratify her caprice. He loaded her with presents. Her jewelry had till now consisted of a few relics of her mother's scanty store—poor little shabby bits of finery which she had safeguarded in former days with a religious care. Now treasures poured in amain. Sir Raphael sent her a diamond necklace, which no female eye—not Olivia's certainly—could contemplate without emotion. Claude himself was continually bringing her some new costly offering, always

in the best taste, *recherché*, beautiful, such as a lovely woman might well love wherewith to decorate her loveliness. Rich relations and a wide circle of those who were friends of the De Renzis, or who wished to become so, kept up the golden deluge. Olivia was pleased with her new acquisitions. They were her own; she had never owned anything worth sixpence before. The sensation was novel and agreeable. Yet in the cup of mortal enjoyment there is always the *amari aliquid*. Olivia began to get *blasée* of splendid gifts. With their novelty they lost their charm. Claude condemned not a few of them, as in bad taste, or insufficient in splendour—a blunder or an impertinence on the donor's part. They gave Claude himself, it was obvious, not the slightest satisfaction, except in so far as they gratified Olivia. Such presents as Olivia in former years had received—few, meagre, and of a cheapness that it was now almost a joke to remember—had always meant love, friendship, or sentiment. Olivia felt now with some bitterness that many of her new acquisitions meant nothing—nothing, that is, beyond the conventional compliment due from the donor to Sir Raphael de Renzi for business favours, or to his wife for a given number of dinners, balls, and other social favours.

'Look at this amethyst cross,' she said to Claude one morning; 'is it not lovely? Who is Lady Everard? Why has she sent it to me, I wonder?'

'Do you?' De Renzi answered. 'There is nothing to wonder at. It is gratitude in its purest form, a keen sense of favours to come. Her husband wants my father's support in a railway which he is wanting to run through his side of the county. It is to go right through his estate, and will be worth, I daresay, £100,000 to him. That cross is worth perhaps £50—no!—there is a flaw in that amethyst—it is not worth £30. It is not a bad investment, is it, of Lady Everard? Let us hope it will pay.'

How to find satisfaction in presents so given? in base offerings to court the favour of a millionaire, to buy profitable influence—as much a part of speculative outlay as the cost of advertisements or the commission of an agent. When Olivia's home was broken up, some village children,

whom she loved, had clubbed their halfpennies together and bought of a pedlar, who represented to them the fine arts and commerce of the outer world, a pincushion of hideous splendour, which they presented with much ceremony and soul-stirring emotion to the dear friend who was passing out of their horizon for ever. It could not, on the most generous calculation, have been worth a shilling; but Olivia had received it with tears, with a throbbing heart, with painful pleasure; she remembered it with a glow of affection. None of her splendid marriage offerings had ever stirred a single one of the emotions which lay, thick as the leaves in Vallombrosa, carpeting the untrodden solitude of her existence. They lay there—but no gust of sentiment disturbed them. Her lover's presents were almost as bad as the rest. They were given with prosaic indifference; they lacked romance. They were less the outpouring of a generous soul than judicious investments for one who, by formal arrangements, was to become a member, a brilliant member, of the De Renzi family. Claude haggled over the price of his purchases, drove excellent bargains, and would not buy unless the price was such as satisfied him that he was getting his money's worth. A lover's gift, Olivia romantically deemed, ought not be too carefully appraised by the giver.

Now again, Olivia had a present which touched her. Jack Heriot called one day at his uncle's and made an excuse to speak a word to her apart. 'Come and show me your presents, Olivia. I hear they are magnificent.'

'Come,' said Olivia, leading the way to a back drawing-room where these treasures were arranged, 'but never mind the presents. I am tired to death of them. Sit down here and let us have a chat. How are they all at Huntsham? Why do you never come near me?'

'Because I am too busy, and you are too gay, Olivia. Our lives have drifted apart. We can do each other no good.'

'Indeed,' said Olivia, 'you could do me a great deal of good. I never needed my old friends so badly, or cared more for them. And you are my oldest friend, though sometimes I think you have forgotten it.'

'I shall never forget it,' cried Jack; 'I never could. What have I that I care to remember but our happy Huntsham days? Golden days they were for me. No, Olivia, whatever else I am guilty of towards you it will not be forgetfulness. But I must present my offering—a little sketch of Huntsham, my first performance as a landscape painter. Some day, when I have become famous, it will be invaluable; meanwhile it will recall the days when we were boy and girl.'

'Those happy days!' said Olivia with a sigh. 'What a pity that we cannot live them over again. Thank you, Jack, for your present. It is the one I like best of all. But there is my cousin calling me; I must go back to them.'

Jack went away with a full heart. Olivia had never looked more lovely—gentler, sweeter, more the ideal of his boyish worship. Had her eyes been swimming with tears when she smiled him her farewell? Jack scarcely knew, for his own eyes had been dim. He had been in a sort of dream. Those few moments had translated him to Paradise, only to be thrust out again all too soon on a cold, loveless world. They had been a revelation. Olivia was the same as ever. He was the same. Nature intended them for each other. Had he been a fool or poltroon to let the accidents of fortune deprive him of his rights—to let another win her? It was too late, alas, for such self-questionings to serve any purpose but to enhance the misery of frustrated hopes and vain regrets. Jack was sure now, if never before, that Olivia was his only chance of happiness, and that his loss was irremediable.

Such a scene did not aid in reconciling Olivia to her lot, her present surroundings, her new relations, her destined life. The talk with Jack recalled to her with vividness some things which she was schooling herself to forget—some canons of taste which had now to be ignored, some standards of refinement of which many things and persons around her fell short. The more she saw of her new relations the less congenial did they seem, the less prospect was there of any future affection. Olivia had heard nothing,

at the time, of the family opposition to her engagement. But now the secret escaped. Claude, when she questioned him about it, was constrained to acknowledge that his father had not, at first, regarded the proposed alliance with satisfaction. 'There was nothing in that, surely,' he protested laughingly. 'Fathers always do—do they not?—object to a disinterested love-match like ours. I have no doubt that he still thinks us a couple of simpletons. That need not make us unhappy, Olivia. We are a happy pair of lovers, are we not?'

'Most happy,' said Olivia, whose bad spirits took immediate flight at the first note of affection; 'I am happy at any rate—too happy to be disturbed by small troubles. All the same I wish I did not find my relations, that are to be, quite so terribly alarming! Lady de Renzi and your sisters make me feel shyer than I have ever felt before.'

'You shy!' cried De Renzi; 'but your shyness gives the finishing touch to your perfection; it is the crowning charm.'

Despite her good resolutions and Claude's encouragement, Olivia's intercourse with the De Renzis proved, as familiarity wore off the fine edge of politeness, increasingly disagreeable. Their behaviour was dry, off-hand, sometimes on the verge of rudeness. It chilled her to the very soul. Old campaigners, who have fought their way through the world and know its rough give-and-take, become accustomed to rudeness and indifferent to it. But to the novice—the sensitive, gentle, ardent nature longing for sympathy, for affection, for encouragement—unkindness is the deathblow to high spirits. Olivia, on the days when she went to lunch with the De Renzis, used to come back dreadfully depressed. They filled her with misgivings. They emphasised the phase of Claude's character of which she had seen least, a phase of worldliness, scheming, pushing. In Lady de Renzi and her daughters it was undisguised. Did it exist in Claude? He was ambitious, of course, but ambitious in the right way, the way of noble minds—ambitious of greatness, of power; but did he also share the lower ambitions that swayed his family? Olivia's heart answered this question in a delightfully satisfactory manner.

'If he were thus ambitious—ambitious in a mean sense—would he ever have wished to marry me? Comforting, reassuring, delightful reasoning. Claude himself made light of his relations' behaviour, and explained it with laughing apologies. 'My father,' he said, 'has been all his life coining money till he can hardly see over his gold piles. He would wish his son to follow in his wake, and begin with a lucrative marriage. I believe he thinks it is what marriages were made for. As for my mother, she is like other good mothers, and I daresay had some nice little project—a golden one—for a favourite son. We must propitiate her.'

'Propitiate her!' cried Olivia, whose spirits had been sinking to zero as Claude proceeded with the family portraiture; 'I only wish I could. But how?'

'By succeeding, dear Olivia, as you will; by dazzling the parental vision with something better even than gold; by being, as you cannot help being, the most beautiful, the most brilliant, the gayest, sweetest, most enchanting young lady of your day. You can do it, Olivia; you shall do it. I can see you accomplishing it.'

'And suppose,' said Olivia, 'that I fail? I very likely shall.'

'Fail!' cried De Renzi; 'my wife fail! my beautiful Olivia—with all her charms, backed by her wits and her husband's—fail! what a conception! No, Olivia, you will succeed; all men's hearts will be yours, to say nothing of your husband's:

> '"Not once nor twice in polished London's story
> The path of Beauty's been the road to glory."

You will play your part to perfection.'

'Stop, stop!' cried Olivia, 'I believe that it is the right thing for lovers to be extravagant. How much am I to believe of all this? It is too much, too much. If you love me, Claude, if you are sure that you love me, it is enough.'

'If I love you!' cried De Renzi, by this time roused to excitement. 'Don't you see that I am fanatically in love with you? Am I sure indeed?'

'Well,' said Olivia, 'promise one thing, Claude. If ever you cease to be sure, will you promise to tell me? If you should ever, in the months which are to pass before our marriage, feel a doubt whether I shall be all to you that you wish your wife to be (such things happen to men, you know, sometimes), I bind you by a vow to tell me so that I may make you free.'

'I vow,' cried De Renzi, 'that, if ever I cease to think you the most enchanting of women, I will dub myself fool, villain, and blockhead. But no, Olivia, I am yours for life and death; you must never doubt it.'

'I will not doubt it; I do not. I am yours, too, Claude, for life and death,' Olivia said, putting her hand in De Renzi's with a grave, tender gesture, and letting it stay there; 'perhaps I am frightened at my own good fortune; but I will be frightened no more.'

De Renzi's rhapsodies did not suffice to enable Olivia to regard her new relations with equanimity. She was to find no love, it was clear, among them. Her chance of being tolerated depended on her success. Olivia felt herself well qualified to succeed; but this use of success filled her soul with apprehension and melancholy. Had this family, of which she was about to become a member, really no hearts? Had they never known the touch of human love, the touch that makes the whole world kin? Did they know what it meant—what tenderness, sympathy, devotion meant? Sometimes in their society she had felt as if she were in pandemonium; everything was so bright, so hard, so cynical, so wanting in compassion, so unstirred by any tender or generous impulse. And it was among these people that she was for the future to find her home.

CHAPTER XXXIII

MR. COSMO'S PICNIC

'Strange and piteous to think what a centre of wretchedness a delicate piece of human flesh might be, wrapped round with fine raiment, her ears pierced with gems, her head held loftily, her mouth all smiling patience, the poor soul within her sitting in sick distaste of all things.'

ONE of the occasions, on which De Renzi wished and expected Olivia to shine, was not long in arriving. Mr. Cosmo, despite his cynical conviction that life is not worth living, possessed several important contrivances for enhancing its material enjoyments. He had a villa on the Thames, where luxury as a fine art attained its choicest perfection, and a steam-launch, which was no unworthy pendant to the villa. Both were as near perfection as Cosmo's taste and purse could make them; and this, the most exacting connoisseurs admitted, was very near indeed. A youth spent in Italy had taught Cosmo the sort of abode in which a sultry day, which scorches the outside world, may be safely defied from amid shady recesses and cool arcades; where fountains, plashing on the marble, offer a delicious freshness and lull the senses to a pleasant languor; where everything breathes of indolence and invites to effortless enjoyment. To this agreeable residence it was Cosmo's custom, as the summer's heat came on and London air became oppressive, to invite successive parties of his friends to spend a Sunday with him in the country. For the occasion on which the Heriots and Olivia, and of course, Olivia's lover, were invited, it was arranged that the party should

steam a few miles up the river to a lovely spot where they would find luncheon in the shade awaiting them. This *al fresco* lunch was a tribute to the sultry weather. Those who knew Cosmo looked forward to it with interest, for his *chèf* was renowned for brilliant effects and would be sure to contrive something worthy of an inspiring occasion; and the occasion would be inspiring, for the Duke of Egeria was to be among the guests, and several of the most agreeable men and brilliant women in London had been invited to amuse the Duke of Egeria.

De Renzi, Olivia saw, was extremely gratified at the invitation. The party, Mr. Cosmo wrote kindly, was in honour of Olivia. Mrs. Heriot, too, was delighted. Olivia found it difficult to share their enthusiasm. 'I think I dislike Sunday expeditions,' she said, 'they make Sunday the hardest day's work of the week, and one is in sore need of a rest; and, besides, I am a Puritan, a Methodist. I am fond of an old-fashioned Puritan Sunday.'

'I hope,' said De Renzi, on whose good nature Olivia's announcements of this sort always had rather an irritating effect, 'that you will be able to leave the Puritan at home on this occasion, as Puritanism is not exactly what is in request at Cosmo's entertainments. People go into the country, do they not, because London Sundays are so detestably Puritanic? This party, moreover, Olivia, is intended in your honour. It is a compliment. Cosmo's parties are great events. All the smartest people in London are asked in the course of the summer. Moreover, I particularly want you to be civil to him.'

'Do you?' said Olivia; 'I will do my best; but I do not *feel* particularly civil to him; and he is too civil to me to be quite agreeable. However, I will be as polite as I can. All the same, Claude, I wish that we could get off. I feel as if I would give anything for a quiet day, a quiet evening. When was the last we had, Isabella? I believe I am very tired.'

'What nonsense!' cried Mrs. Heriot; 'it will be the best way of resting. You cannot possibly get off, and why should you?'

'Get off!' exclaimed De Renzi with a clear decisiveness which Olivia began now to observe in him whenever his will was thwarted; 'when I tell you that it is the party of all others that I want you to go to, and that I have a special reason for being glad that you are invited. What an idea!'

Olivia said nothing. She resigned herself to her fate. She had, in fact, besides her fatigue, a special reason for wishing not to go, which she did not choose to produce in public. The day in question was a sad one to her, the date of her mother's death. She and her father had always kept it with a pious observance. Little had been said or done, but each had known what was passing in the other's mind. They had kept it together for the last time, as it had proved, the summer before his death. The next time Olivia had been among strangers at the Pines and had observed it in privacy. Now it seemed a sort of pious duty to father as well as mother to keep it. Olivia longed to do so. She longed to be quiet, to be alone, to commune in spirit with the loved ones whom she had lost, to give herself to serious thoughts, which all around her ignored, which all things tended to obliterate in herself. There seemed no one to whom she dared to confide her wish. It would have been folly, profanation, to drag such a feeling out for Isabella's cold unfeeling eye to stare at. It was Olivia's secret, her own private sentiment. It was sacred to her. She dreaded profaning it. Afterwards, when they were alone together, and De Renzi seemed in a congenial mood, she told him. Alas! she was grievously disappointed at the reception that her confidence encountered. De Renzi seemed annoyed at a further attempt to controvert his wish. He evidently could not understand her feeling. He could not conceal that the excuse seemed to him an absurd one. He was entirely unsympathetic. Olivia, greatly disconcerted, felt only a passionate desire to withdraw the topic from discussion. She would go anywhere, she would submit to anything rather than have the subject discussed by those who could not understand it. 'Say no more, Claude,' she said. 'I will go. I see you wish it. I daresay that

I shall enjoy it. The truth is that I have a prejudice against Mr. Cosmo. I cannot bear his eyes.'

'A woman's reason!' cried De Renzi, mollified by Olivia's acquiescence. 'What do his eyes signify to us? They are not the most ingenuous in the world, I admit; nor is candour Cosmo's forte. None the less his parties are excellent. Everybody goes to them, or would like to go.'

'What a dreadful person Everybody is,' said Olivia with a sigh, 'and what a tyrant about tastes—and what odd tastes they sometimes are! Why is Everybody always to be dictating to us? For my part, I retain my opinion of Mr. Cosmo's eyes; they are detestable.'

'Well,' said De Renzi with some peremptoriness of tone, 'you have decided to go to his party, and I have given in about his eyes, so we have no points of difference. I hope you will be gracious to him.'

Mr. Cosmo was a power in the City: he controlled the policy of the great Inter-oceanic Trust, and the influence of the Inter-oceanic Trust was, just now, of importance to the De Renzis. They had a big transaction on hand, a Bolivian loan, involving vast interests to all concerned. There were rivals in the field. Opinions were divided. To lose an ally at such a moment would be disastrous. Cosmo had not yet been gained; he might be lost. To offend him would be calamitous. The essential thing was to conciliate him, and Olivia's graces were a powerful means of conciliation. Nor was he, to all appearance, difficult to conciliate. He was a man of foibles, and his pet foible was to be smiled upon by the reigning beauties of the day. No one in certain circles, it was said, had established her position as a woman of fashion till she had been fêted by Cosmo. For men he cared little, and took but little trouble to be polite to them.

'Why are you not friends with Cosmo?' some one had asked of Stonehouse, àpropos of this very party.

'Because,' said that gentleman with laconic severity, 'I do not happen to be young, pretty, and somebody else's wife; and, moreover, because Cosmo always reminds me of

that wise dictum of somebody's, that human nature is a damned rascal.'

'What do you think of him yourself?' Olivia had asked De Renzi.

'What do I think of him?' her lover answered in the airy manner which, Olivia knew, meant that the subject did not require further discussion; 'I think he is what he looks —estimable, benevolent, a cultured gentleman, an eminent Christian, a perfect host. In other words, Sir Raphael de Renzi and Company need his assistance for their Bolivian loan.'

'And it is for that,' cried Olivia, 'that you wish me to be gracious to him, and to endure his politeness, or, as I regard it, his impertinence? What a use to make of one!'

'Is not that a rather rough way of putting it?' pleaded De Renzi. 'Come, Olivia, come down from your sublimities and talk like a reasonable woman. We business people have our concerns to manage, like the rest of mankind. They depend on negotiation, and negotiations depend on good humour, and no one can manufacture good humour like a charming woman. It is charming woman's celestial function in a world of blundering men. How would anything get on without her and her benign intervention? Into what pie does she not dip her pretty finger tips? Women move the world, they smooth irritation, they allay suspicion, they conciliate good-will, they supply a motive to men who would otherwise be motiveless; they——'

'They float Bolivian loans!' said Olivia; 'I see. I understand it all now. We are the light artillery in the battle of life, we rush in where men are afraid to tread. We effect what men are too clumsy to manage; we are the chimney-sweeps whom cruel masters send up into the soot in order not to have to go themselves. What a grand idea of woman's position in the world!'

'Grand or not,' said De Renzi with some irritation, for Olivia's satirical and contemptuous moods seemed to him disagreeably easy to arouse, 'it is the truth. They all do it,

and the sanctimonious ones the worst. Show me the woman, who has the power to influence mankind, who does not turn her powers to good account.'

'In short,' said Olivia, 'I am to bury my prejudices against Mr. Cosmo full forty fathoms deep and behave to him like an angel. Those are my orders.'

De Renzi was exceedingly provoked, but it would not do, he felt clearly, to show provocation. 'You are making too much of it altogether,' he said. 'A man, whom everybody likes and to whom everybody goes, asks you among the rest. He is powerful, and we want his power on my father's side, and not against him. What is there in our accepting his hospitality? Are we to insult him because we don't consider his manner perfect, and have a lurking suspicion that he is not a paragon of virtue. How many men are?'

'I know one man who is,' said Olivia; 'one is enough for me. 'Seriously, Claude, I will do exactly what you wish. I will go to the picnic. I will go anywhere you tell me. I trust myself to you. Wherever I go I shall feel safe so long as you are at hand to protect me.'

'You will need no protection,' said De Renzi. 'Every one acknowledges that, whatever his other shortcomings, Cosmo is a perfect host.'

'Is he?' said Olivia. 'I will take your word for it, Claude. We will discuss him no more.'

De Renzi had by this time begun to perceive that Olivia had much to learn, that she was not particularly docile, and was likely to give a great deal of trouble before her education was complete. He had an uncomfortable consciousness that he had to do with a courageous spirit, to whom fear was unknown, and whose submission would be difficult to achieve. It would be difficult to dominate such a woman. All the more resolvedly did he determine on domination.

Mrs. Heriot, too, considered that Olivia stood in need of a little good advice. She took an early opportunity of giving her a lecture on the behaviour of a properly conducted *fiancée*.

'Do you know,' she said, 'that you are an alarmingly independent young lady, and too fastidious for a fallen world? You are endangering your own happiness. Claude is devoted to you, and will stand a great deal; but nothing shocks a man so much as self-will.'

'Self-will!' cried Olivia; 'I thought I was submissiveness itself. I did all that Claude asked me.'

'Yes,' said the other, 'but after a sort of pitched battle. Put fights of that kind off, let me advise you, Olivia, till after your marriage, and do not turn up your nose at parties which your future lord and master wishes you to grace. For my part I cannot conceive why you should not like Mr. Cosmo.'

'Like him!' cried Olivia; 'like eyes of blue steel, cold, cruel, hard! the smile of Judas, the sneer of Mephistopheles. No, Isabella, I do not like him, nor ever shall. He frightens, he shocks me. I breathe more comfortably when he is away. I shall feel better when this horrid party is over. I owe Sir Raphael de Renzi a grudge that I am obliged to go to it.'

Olivia felt herself, her better self, her sentiment, her tenderness, her aspirations, being gradually asphyxiated. In the Finnish epic there is a story of a divine artificer, who fashions for some amorous deity a bride of gold and silver. The amorous deity is pleased at first with the splendour of his new possession; but joy gives way to horror when he discovers that, in spite of fur and fire, whenever he touches her she freezes him. So Olivia, amid the glamour of wealth and much external finery that dazzled her, began to feel a mortal chill. Something in her lover was turning her to ice. Supposing that, like the Finnish bride, he was composed of precious metals, not of warm and living flesh and blood! Olivia was running the round of pleasure: life was one long banquet; but dissatisfaction, weariness of heart, *ennui* attended at the profuse repast. She lived in a crowd, but, ah, how solitary may the soul become, crowded and hustled by uncongenial surroundings. 'Little do men perceive,' says Bacon, 'what solitude is, how far it extendeth. For

a crowd is not company, and faces are but a gallery of pictures, and talk but a tinkling cymbal, where there is no love.' Of this sort of cruel, loveless solitude Olivia's gentle soul was now becoming painfully aware.

CHAPTER XXXIV

A SUNDAY ON THE THAMES

'A bolt is shot back somewhere in our breast,
And a lost pulse of feeling stirs again;
The eyes sink inward and the heart lies plain,
And what we mean we say, and what we would we know;
A man becomes aware of his life's flow,
And hears its winding murmur; and he sees
The meadows where it glides, the sun, the breeze;
And then he thinks he knows
The hills where his hope rose
And the sea where it goes.'

THE morning was sultry, and Mr. Cosmo's guests, as the launch went speeding amid meadow and woodland, congratulated themselves heartily on their escape from the dust and glare of London to the shade and the cool breezes that were ruffling the Thames beneath the Clifden woods. A midsummer sky blazed overhead, but cloudlets here and there spoke of disturbances in the upper regions; and there was a heaviness in the atmosphere which seemed as if exhausted nature were panting for the refreshment of a storm. The storm, however, would not, the weatherwise predicted, be till to-morrow; and meanwhile the languor of the outer world seemed to suggest complete self-surrender to the most indolent possible form of enjoyment. Lounging on the sofas of Cosmo's launch, with the prospect of further lounging in the delicious shade of the lime trees, beneath which the banquet of the afternoon was awaiting them, was just the sort of existence for which the party felt disposed. Everything around them spoke of pleasurable ease. The river was gay with holiday-makers,

bent, like themselves, on an otiose Sunday. They passed group after group, whose merry sounds, holiday costumes, and reposeful attitudes told a pleasant tale of ease and mirth. No one, surely, has really seen England, or gauged the capacity of Englishmen for play as well as work, who has not watched the gay array of holiday-makers who crowd the pleasant reaches of the Thames on a fine summer day. On either side the country lay smiling—a dream of rest. The hay fields, still new from the scythe, gleamed bright and clean; great breadths of corn were yellowing for the harvest. The villages peeped out amid the woodlands, the church bells were sounding pleasantly across the meadows. The party on the launch grew gay. The Duke of Egeria had arrived in high spirits, evidently resolved to enjoy himself. Every surrounding circumstance seemed to abet him in that laudable resolution. The ladies, scattered in picturesque groups about the sofas and easy-chairs with which the launch abounded, formed a charming centre to the loveliness of surrounding nature.

Mrs. Backhouse, not too broken hearted to be exquisitely dressed, shone serenely in a costume the artless simplicity of which all felt to be consummate art. Beside her sat Florian, whose recent volume of sonnets proclaimed him the apostle of æstheticism. He was now, with the privileged outspokenness of friendship, complimenting Mrs. Backhouse on the poetry of her dress. 'It is a pastoral symphony,' he said; 'a medley of exquisite tints. It breathes of the daffodils, the buttercups, and the daisies.'

'We will go and gather some this afternoon,' Mrs. Backhouse said, raising her lovely azure eyes to reward Florian's politeness. 'I shall expect an impromptu sonnet under the lime trees.'

There were other ladies, however, whose dresses had been designed with other ideas than that of simplicity. Miss Bond, the last imported American heiress, was as impressive in daring effects as M. Worth could make her. She was now entertaining the duke with an exhibition of naïve impertinence, which English society had been for several weeks past encouraging her to mistake for wit. The duke

showed no intention of undeceiving her. Mrs. Calverby, a brilliant daughter of the Manchester plutocracy and one of Cosmo's most recent conquests, rivalled the American beauty in daring of toilette and originality of talk. There was little likelihood of conversation running short; but, to guard against the possibility, M. Duc, the famous Sociétaire of the Comédie Française, was to give an impromptu; and a young gentleman, known to his friends as Dodo—a spoilt darling of the Household Brigade, and one of Mrs. Backhouse's most favoured devotees—had brought his banjo, and promised to enliven the afternoon with a comic performance. The feminine ranks were further reinforced by Mrs. Mountjoy, a professional beauty, and Mrs. Araby, a certificated wit. All seemed perfectly familiar with each other, and all completely at their ease—all, that is, except Olivia, who was feeling each moment more exquisitely uncomfortable. Mrs. Araby had scanned her through her eyeglass as she came on board, and had turned to ask something of the gentleman beside her; then she had said something in low tones which had produced a laugh. Miss Bond made no secret of her satisfaction in being introduced to Olivia, as one of the sights of London. 'I have so often heard about you,' she said good naturedly, 'and your gay deceiver. Now, happily for womankind, he will deceive no more!' Then there was another laugh, and everybody seemed to be amused. De Renzi did not share the amusement. He stood frowning, and biting his moustache, as was his custom when annoyed. Olivia began to wish herself anywhere but where she was. What was there to be amused at in a vulgar American's familiarity? There is no more effectual estrangement than a difference of taste in jokes. Olivia felt this estrangement; her spirits began to sink. In vain De Renzi brought up one gentleman after another to be introduced to her; in vain Cosmo came and devoted himself to being agreeable; in vain Mrs. Heriot took her to sit by Mrs. Araby, 'the most amusing woman in London, you know;' in vain Dodo tried all his powers of fascination to win her to a congenial mood; in vain was it that Florian told a series of admirable stories, which sent his audience into paroxysms

of hilarity; vain were the witticisms, professional and amateur, that flashed around; vain were Olivia's own endeavours to be amused, to be as gay as her companions, to join in the talk that was flowing, so brisk and bright, on all hands around her. Her soul was growing cold within her. Struggle against it as she would, shyness, such as she had never before experienced, beset her, benumbing every faculty, paralysing every effort at cheerfulness. There was something in these people, in their style, their behaviour, their talk, their freemasonry, which made Olivia feel herself in a world of strangers, of enemies. She was not neglected, indeed; but how grateful she would have felt for a little kindly neglect, for assured protection from Mrs. Araby's cynical smile, Cosmo's eye, Miss Bond's impertinent tongue! She moved away and sought such refuge as was to be found in the narrow limits of the launch beside Mrs. Pygmalion. Mrs. Araby presently formed a little group around her of people with whom she could feel sure of amusing herself. Olivia was out of the talk, but fragments of the conversation fell, now and then, on her ear and obliged her to listen.

'I have brought a book,' Mrs. Araby said, showing a little volume to Mr. Pygmalion. 'I always do on these occasions. You never know what may happen. If we are shipwrecked on a desert island, and food and conversation fail, I sit secure. I am provided against the worst. Stevenson is always delightful.'

'Delightful!' cried Pygmalion, who had been glancing at the book's contents; 'here, for instance, are some delightful things about marriage! I must read you them. He describes it as a terrible renunciation!'

'Renunciation!' cried Mrs. Araby. 'Mr. de Renzi, this is interesting to you. Pray go on, Mr. Pygmalion.'

'"A field of battle, not a bed of roses,"' continued Pygmalion, picking out the phrases for public edification. '"A married man must roam no longer. Once married there are no more by-path meadows where you may innocently linger; but the road lies long, and straight, and dusty to the grave. . . . You may think you had a conscience and believed in God; but what is a conscience to a wife? To

marry is to domesticate the recording angel. Once you are married there is nothing left for you, not even suicide, but to be good."'

'What a conception of a wife!' cried Mrs. Araby; 'a domesticated recording angel! the last sort of person one would wish to have about the premises!'

'Horrible,' cried Pygmalion. 'I thought that the great point about a wife was, that there should be one person, at any rate, who is firmly convinced that there is nothing to record, or who, if there is, will drop a tear upon the place for the purpose of effacement.'

'That is what nature intends,' said the duke; 'men must work, except a few of us whose doom it is to play, and women must weep. Poor women!'

'Of course,' cried Florian; 'tears are her weapon, her grand resource. Even Napoleon, with a chaos of crushed empires at his imperial foot, admitted that he was no match for Josephine when she began to whimper. A tear is unanswerable.'

'The only answer, I suppose,' said Pygmalion, 'is to kiss it away.'

'In other words,' said Mrs. Araby, 'unconditional surrender.'

'And all done by a gland,' said Florian. 'So like Nature's grand simplicity—the entire male creation subjugated by a single pearly drop, which the female eye produces at its own sweet will.'

'Yes,' said Pygmalion, 'you know De Renzi's classic lines—

> '"When lovely woman finds 'tis folly
> To hope that husbands will obey,
> What charm will cure her melancholy,
> What art restore her threatened sway?
>
> '"The art her empire to recover,
> To quell the would-be rebel's eye;
> To tame a disobedient lover,
> Or crush a husband—is to cry!"'

'And pray,' said Mrs. Araby, turning to De Renzi, 'how did you learn that? by experience, I suppose.'

There was a general laugh; some eyes were turned on Mrs. Backhouse, some on De Renzi. Olivia happened to look up in the direction of Mrs. Backhouse, and witnessed an unusual spectacle. That lady was accomplishing a most pronounced blush—deep, prolonged, unmistakable. She looked as uncomfortable as Olivia felt.

'Spare him,' said Florian; 'he is about to domesticate his recording angel. There is nothing left to him, not even suicide, but to be good.'

'Well,' said Mrs. Araby, 'it is never too late to mend; and nowadays almost anything can be mended, however small the little bits.'

De Renzi was looking black as thunder. 'Mrs. Araby's acid drops will help the process,' he said; 'her dark innuendoes and her bright example!'

'He has *me* on his conscience,' said Miss Bond; 'the victim of systematic neglect. My heart is broken. I shall weep a small Niagara when I get home to-night!'

'Woman's tears!' said Mrs. Araby; 'why is it that marriage should involve so many of them!'

'Because,' said the duke, 'the domesticated angel is apt to be a little too domestic.'

'And naturally,' put in Florian, 'a little too angelic.'

'Or,' said Cosmo, 'because, as some one has observed, there is all the difference between being in love with a woman and being harnessed to her—bit, blinkers, bearing rein, and the coachman's whip if you begin to fidget! It is slavery, and a man hates his slave-driver. There must, I suppose, be husbands and wives; but it is inevitable that they should be mutually disagreeable. The worst thing to do with a charming woman is to marry her.'

'You remember,' said M. Duc, 'the philosophy of a countryman of mine—"Si J'aimais une femme je la *marierais peut-être, mais pas avec moi.*"'

'*Marriage is a mistake, no doubt,*' said Mrs. Araby; 'the great thing is to retrieve it judiciously. To quote another of your countrymen, M. Duc—"Ce ne sont pas toujours nos fautes qui nous perdent; c'est la manière de se conduire après les avoir faites."'

'But some men actually like it,' said Cosmo. 'Rousseau, you remember, says that he lived as happily with his Theresa—mean, greedy, jealous, and dull—as though she were a paragon of beauty and wit.'

'But Rousseau,' said Mrs. Araby, 'was a genius. Moreover he did his own recording angel's business for himself.'

'Yes,' said, Cosmo, 'and some women like it, or behave as if they did, which encourages the rest, happily for the world. Marriage keeps them busy——'

'And keeps them smart,' said Florian. 'Their lovely dresses are a compliment to us. Your earnest woman, who scorns mankind and lives for a purpose, is apt to neglect woman's first great purpose—her toilette.'

'I don't see that at all,' said Mrs. Backhouse: 'the better I am dressed the better I feel, and the more in earnest. I always put on something pretty when I visit my hospital.'

'Well,' said the duke, 'every woman should have an object.'

'But no woman should *be* one,' said Cosmo. 'See, here is our landing-place.'

CHAPTER XXXV

A BLACK CLOUD WITH A SILVER LINING

'As angels in some brighter dreams
Call to the soul when man doth sleep,
So some strange thoughts transcend our wonted themes
And into glory peep.'

THE party was soon on shore. A gentle slope of turf, stretching far on either side, formed a natural fringe to the woodland, which crept down toward the river bank. Some skilful hand had thinned the forest to the extent best calculated to reveal its charms. Here a noble stem stood out and met the eye in bold outline and relief; here a mass of creepers, tossed in romantic confusion from branch to branch, hid everything but their own fantastic exuberance; here well-shaded avenues, cut into the wood, cool with overhanging foliage and grassy path, hinted of pleasant depths of gloom beyond the reach of the blazing, scorching world outside. Every one hurried to the shade.

'Here,' cried Mrs. Backhouse, who had no intention of letting Florian off his engagement as her cavalier; 'here we shall find the daffodils and the daisies. I should like to wander all day in these delicious glades.'

'Idyllic!' cried Florian, 'with an interval, however, for refreshments.'

'Well,' said Cosmo, 'you can have a forest stroll now, if you prefer it to driving. The carriages must go round; but if you are not afraid of a mile in the shade, we will make a short-cut through the woodland to our lunch. The trees are worth looking at.'

'I vote for walking,' cried Mrs. Araby, and everybody followed her example.

'Come, Mrs. Calverby,' said Cosmo, 'let us lead the way.'

'Who, pray,' asked the duke of Florian as they fell enough behind to be out of hearing, 'is Mrs. Calverby? I have seen her several times of late. A showy woman, finely dressed, and with fine diamonds.'

'The wife of some Stock Exchange potentate,' said Pygmalion, 'who, no doubt, gives her as many fine dresses and diamonds as she wants.'

'The City woman,' said Florian, 'or, rather, the West End woman with a City husband,

'"bears
The cost of princes on unworthy shoulders."'

'Hardly on her shoulders,' said Pygmalion; 'the tide of Mrs. Calverby's extravagance does not swell quite as high as that. But, bare as they generally are, her shoulders are worthy of adoration. I must have them for my Nausicaa.'

'Why is it,' said the duke, 'that some women cultivate propriety by trying to look as improper as they can?'

'As if,' said Florian, 'they imagined "meretricious" to be the feminine of "meritorious"—which, for aught I know, it may be. But for my part I dislike glitter and gilt.'

'Spelling guilt with a *u* or without it?' asked Pygmalion.

'We must ask Cosmo how to spell it,' said the duke. 'He knows everything.'

The path had opened and formed a sloping stretch of sward, in the midst of which, on a little eminence, stood a group of noble limes. Glimpses of the river peeped here and there through the wood. The lime trees threw a wide stretch of shade around them. A hum of bees in the upper branches filled the air with a slumbrous murmur. A delicious breeze, rich with sylvan scents, was blowing across the stream. Cosmo's banquet, spread beneath the trees, glistened—a mass of rich colour—amid the soft surrounding tints.

'You must all come to the top of the hill,' said Cosmo, 'and get the view of the river and the most picturesque little

church you ever saw. It is a tiny affair, but as old as the hills—as old, at any rate, as the Heptarchy.'

'The Heptarchy!' cried Miss Bond, awed into momentary decorum by the idea of such antiquity; 'and do you mean that none of you people have ever made a pilgrimage to it before?'

The scene was indeed romantic enough to fire a less ready enthusiasm than Miss Bond's. At the foot of the hill, but a few yards away, closely neighboured by overhanging trees and half buried in its own ivy, stood a little country church. A few half-obliterated grave-stones and a couple of yews, whose widespreading gnarled branches bespoke the flight of centuries, gave the scene its completing touches of quiet, melancholy rest. There were but few signs of modern use; though a rough road and one or two converging paths from different quarters of the wood showed how a congregation, or rather such modest attempt at one as the narrow limits of the building allowed, might assemble. Few evidently now frequented it. A village, so tradition said, for which it had been built, had disappeared before a Norman monarch's sporting requirements in the way of undisturbed deer-coverts. Religious scruples had saved the church; it served now, probably, for an occasional service to some outlying hamlet; but the deserted look and unfrodden paths showed that few were the worshippers who sought this unpretentious shrine. Some children stood in the porch, however, and it was obvious that some use of it was being made to-day.

'The Heptarchy!' exclaimed Miss Bond reverentially, as she stood and gazed, 'I adore old things of every sort, especially churches. I must go down and indulge in some romance.'

'We will all go afterwards,' said Cosmo, 'and be as romantic as you please. At present the claims of the practical, in the shape of lunch, are not to be denied. See, there is Franz sending to tell us that it is ready.'

This small diversion had given M. Franz the necessary time to put the finishing touches to several delicacies whose perfection would have been endangered by an instant's

delay. Everything was now complete, and the party soon disposed itself around a banquet, which, even its critical author, as he stood complacently watching its consumption from a distance, admitted to be worthy of his master, the occasion, and himself.

The champagne began to flow. The guests, with appetites quickened by the fatigues of the morning, busied themselves with courageous essays into the unimagined refinements of M. Franz's *menu*. The good cheer told its tale in a general rise of spirits. The duke was happy, and made M. Franz happy by demanding a second help of a new pudding, expressly devised in his honour for the occasion, and christened Egeria. The stream of conversation ran quick, strong and boisterous. Mrs. Araby's venom became profuse, Miss Bond's fun uproarious.

The attractions of the repast diverted attention from the disagreeable fact that the clouds were gathering thickly overhead. The gloom now suddenly increased, and, before luncheon was over, sundry ominous growls and rumbles announced that the fair promise of the morning was not to be fulfilled. The storm, after all, was going to be to-day. It grew darker and darker. Already a drop had fallen on Mrs. Backhouse's dress.

'*Actum est!*' cried Florian, 'the most beautiful toilette in Europe will be ruined!'

What was to be done? The launch had not yet arrived; the carriages had been sent off to a village, a mile away, till after lunch. Nobody had paid a cloudless morning the bad compliment of bringing an umbrella.

'Fortunately,' cried Cosmo, 'we can, like other destitutes, take refuge in the church. We shall be an interesting addition to the congregation! Mrs. Araby, let us fly! None of you would forgive me if I betrayed you to a drenching, and I should never forgive myself.'

A vivid flash, which gave the disagreeable impression of lightning being ubiquitous, and a crashing peal of thunder close overhead, put an end to hesitation. The rain began to fall. There was a stampede for the church. The doors, happily, were open. Service was in course of performance.

In another instant the whole party were safely established beneath a welcome roof. The building was small, shabby to the last degree, and tenanted only by scanty groups—a little row of children, a few old women and labourers. Olivia entered the first pew which offered, and found herself alone in one of those high-walled enclosures, which the exclusivism of our grandfathers considered the fittest for purposes of public prayer. The building must have been dark at all times, shut in on every side by huge. overtowering trees, the narrow windows curtailed still further by encroaching ivy. But from without, just now, but little light was to be had. It was dark, and grew darker every moment. The humble ceremony progressed despite the crash of thunder and the pelting rain outside. The school children, clustered round the altar, assisted in the modest rite. The silence, the safety, the solitude, struck upon Olivia's senses with a sudden feeling of exquisite relief. The familiar words fell upon her ear like voices from a vanished world. A sense of peace, of rest, came over her. For a while she was safe. The rain, happily, showed no symptom of abating. The service would last another half hour at the least. An interval of quiet was assured—a respite, however short-lived, from the disagreeable surroundings of the rest of the day. Priest and people knelt to pray; Olivia followed their example. To pray? Was prayer, then, still an employment for reasonable beings? Was the side of things to which prayer belonged, with which religion had to do, still a reality? Is there still a world where the unseen, the invisible, the intangible, the aspirations of pious souls seeking for good, struggling through imperfection and failure towards its attainment, the patient fortitude of the unhappy, the penitent's self-searchings, the martyr's enthusiasm, are actual living forces, not the mere fictions of half-crazed brains, the joke of cynics, the contempt of philosophers? Has man a soul and a future, a duty to God, to his fellow-man, to himself? Is conscience the voice of God speaking within the soul, not a phrase for the scruples of the timorous, the hesitation of the cowardly? Is life an awful glimpse of eternity, of vast

eternities, stretching far away behind and before, a moment's revelation of unknowable, impenetrable mysteries, not the fortuitous concourse of a few atoms into a fleeting phantom, for which 'I know not and I care not' is the appropriate creed, and 'Let us eat and drink for to-morrow we die' the only rational philosophy? Is religion a reality, the only reality, amid the phantasms of existence, or the last flicker of expiring superstitions at which civilised mankind can only smile? And, if a reality, what were the people among whom Olivia's lot was now cast? What was he to whose care she was about to commit herself, body and soul, with whom she was to face the actualities of the present, the possibilities of the future? What were her present companions? Was there anything which could awe them to a seriousness, or melt them to a tender mood? Was there anything at which they would not sneer?—anything but the material in which they believed?—anything beyond the pleasures of sense for which they cared?

The service went on, prayer and chant and hymn. How familiar those sounds, how dear. They recalled the Sunday afternoons at her father's church. Those afternoons! How far they seemed to have vanished into the limbo of the past. Yet they, at least, were real. This had been the real part of Olivia's life. She had lived a phantasmal, an unreal existence ever since. Those times came back upon her now, so vivid, so living, that they crowded out the present: some summer evenings when she had walked with her father across the fields, and he had been in an especially charming mood. Those evenings had seemed delightful then, but now they gleamed with the very light of Paradise. He sat by her once again. He held her hand. He was lying on his sofa while she sang to him. He was reciting some well-loved passage. He was reading to her from some favourite book. She was singing the songs he loved to hear. Olivia bent her head; the tears began to flow. What a life had this been, and what a companion! How peaceful, solemn, pure; how cheered by a noble philosophy, how stirred by noble aspirations and noble hopes! Beside it, how like a horrid nightmare seemed the life of which she

was now tasting, the people with whom she now consorted. These men—cynical, cold, incredulous of good, of generous motive, of loyal act, who sneered at virtue as a pretence, at religion as a dream of savages, who threw off every trammel of creed or custom. Were they the better, the nobler, for their so-called emancipation, for their enlightened selfishness, their scorn of all that mankind has held sacred, their scoffing contempt for all that which awes the mind, that checks the hand of passion, that interferes with animal pleasure? These women—Mrs. Araby, with her poisoned jokes, her ruthless sarcasms, her tongue of evil, her eye of malice; Miss Bond, with her coarse effrontery; Isabella, with her mean contrivances and ignoble aims; the duke, with his cynical selfishness; Cosmo, with wicked glittering eyes. Olivia thought of Lady Heriot—serene, gentle, refined, courageous, but with how different a courage from the senseless indifference of the mundane throng around her. How calm, how resigned, how hopeful, how truly great! 'Death stands above me,' she had once said to Olivia in a confidential moment—

> '"Death stands above me, whispering low
> I know not what into my ear;
> Of his strange language all I know
> Is there is not a word of fear."'

How did her present companions look at death but as one degrading incident of an existence made up of degradations! What would Lady Heriot have thought of these people? What would she have thought of Olivia's predicament?

. . . . . .

A sudden light shone in upon her and lit up her soul with the radiance of hope. It had all the suddenness of an inspiration. From whence did it come and how? Her fate was not irretrievably fixed. There was still a door of escape; salvation might be achieved. Of late the cup of life had been full of distasteful ingredients. She had never known true happiness, contentment, peace of soul, since her engagement. She had entered on it, had been hurried

into it, betrayed into it, rashly, ignorantly. It was open to her still to draw back, if fuller knowledge, riper experience warned her from a disastrous self-surrender. She had discovered many things about herself, many about her lover, since that promise had been given. They had altered her view; they had filled her with fear, distrust, sometimes actual dislike. She might yet be free. Her heart leapt up in exultation at the thought. 'Leave this land of false enchantment,' an inward monitor seemed to cry; 'turn your back on these false joys, these dangerous companions, these unreal pleasures. Seek happiness elsewhere, or forego the search. You can do this, you dare to do it, you must. You will need courage, strength, heroism. Be courageous, heroic.' The thought spread over Olivia's mind like some welcome stream flowing on to the parched soil, carrying with it refreshment, renovation, life. Hope, joy, radiance ineffable broke in upon her soul. Deliverance was still achievable. Her fate was still in her own hands.

Olivia went out of church inspired with a new idea. Ruin—if indeed ruin was now before her—was still to be escaped. She resolved, cost what it might, to escape it. She was a hopeful, happy woman, with a brave resolve.

The storm was over. Some carriages had arrived to convey the party to the launch, where welcome tea was awaiting them. They became very merry as they steamed down the river to Cosmo's villa. The *contretemps* of the afternoon had, to some extent, marred the perfection of the day's arrangements, but it reacted on the gentlemen's spirits. Nothing is so provocative of mirth as a small misfortune, well got through—a crisis that proves not too critical for good humour to surmount. The ladies' dresses were saved, so that the misfortune had been a very small one. Cosmo's luncheon had served its purpose before the downpour reduced the *débris* to undistinguishable ruins. M. Franz alone, who got his feet wet and caught a violent cold, breathed a deeper vow than ever of detestation of the English climate, and contempt for the English habit of feeding, like animals, in the open air. The English guests appeared, however, if one might judge from their hilarity,

to consider that all things had gone as they ought. Florian threw off the poet and asked several conundrums which had never been heard before, and which served to amuse London drawing-rooms for the next fortnight. M. Duc delivered his famous monologue—'l'homme qui pleure'—with inimitable verve. Dodo produced his banjo and sang a comic song, which Thérèsa had rendered celebrated at the Palais Royal, and which that enterprising young gentleman had gone to Paris on purpose to learn direct from its illustrious performer. It was his *chef-d'œuvre—Pst-Pst—m'amie;* it was lively; it was rollicking; it was audacious; it went far, a little too far, perhaps, to be quite in good form; but this was not an occasion to be particular, and anything was better than not being amused. There was a roar of applause as the performance closed.

'My blushes,' said Mrs. Araby, 'like the moonlight, are hidden by the clouds, but I beg everybody to understand that I am blushing. Dodo, I blush for you.'

'And so do I,' said Mrs. Backhouse; 'I hope he is blushing for himself.'

'I am sorry,' said the duke, 'that I cannot pay you the compliment of blushing, even in the dark. I have forgotten how that juvenile tribute to propriety is paid. Dodo's performance had but a single fault, and a good one—it was too short.'

'It was broader than it was long,' said Florian—'the fashionable shape for comic songs. I vote that we encore it.'

Olivia, little disturbed by the surrounding hilarity, sat peacefully in the gloom, busied with her own thoughts, and enjoying an inward cheerfulness that was all her own.

CHAPTER XXXVI

MISS BOND IS CONFIDENTIAL

'When the Devil of my youth
Had set me on those mountain peaks of hope,
All glittering with the dawn dew, all erect
And famished for the moon.'

SILENCE reigned in Cosmo's villa. The ladies had vanished to their rooms for the duties of the toilette and the pleasures of repose. Isabella Heriot, for once, was sufficiently tired to be glad of an interval of quiet, and to remember, at her ease, that even an informal occasion demands a well-considered *déshabille*. Mrs. Backhouse was intending to crown the triumphs of the day with a tea-gown, the lovely freshness and flowing outlines of which had not as yet been revealed to mortal eye. Several of the other ladies would do their best not to be eclipsed by Mrs. Backhouse. Olivia, inspired by no such ambition, was ready to descend long before her cousin had accomplished her preparation for this interesting contest. She was longing to escape. Her room felt oppressive, suffocating. Outside a river breeze was stirring the tree tops with a delicious murmur. The storm of the afternoon had given place to an exquisite evening. The moon was floating through a fleecy sky. The last clouds were sinking in the horizon. The terrace, the marble steps, the lawns, the river beyond, were bathed in soft floods of light. The garden promised an undisturbed retreat, a solitary half hour for the rest of weary spirits, the restoration of shattered nerves. Olivia threw a shawl around her and prepared to fly. The hope of soli-

tude, however, was illusory. As Olivia crossed the hall to the wide windows that opened upon the terrace Miss Bond emerged from the drawing-room. She evidently wished to be confidential.

'We are the first,' she said; 'not a soul is to be found. I was making for the garden. We can sit and talk in the colonnade. Let me come with you.'

'I have something to say to you,' continued Miss Bond as soon as they had found a seat. 'You have not enioyed to-day. I saw it all. It was not likely that you should. You have disliked us all, and we have deserved disliking. For my part I am furious with Mrs. Araby for her behaviour. A joke is a joke, but her jokes are past bearing. She has a grudge against Mr. de Renzi—an old grudge. They are sworn foes. But that is no excuse for being brutal, as I consider that she was this morning.'

'I thought her rather rude,' said Olivia; 'but brutal?'

'She was brutal to all of you,' said Miss Bond—'you, Mr. de Renzi, and poor Theresa Backhouse.'

'Mrs. Backhouse!' cried Olivia; 'what had she to do with it?'

'Do you not know?' said her companion. 'You surely must.'

'No,' said Olivia, 'I know nothing. What is it? Do tell me.'

'Do you really mean that you do not know that Mrs. Backhouse is dreadfully aggrieved at Mr. de Renzi deserting her! Poor creature, she is inconsolable!'

'Deserting her?' cried Olivia. 'What can you mean? Why, she is a married woman!'

'Which makes the desertion all the more poignant. Married women like desertion as little as the rest of us. And Mrs. Backhouse's desertion was a bad one. Mr. de Renzi was devoted to her last season. They were mutually devoted, a real, serious, bona-fide devotion. It lasted till you appeared upon the scene. Then he threw her over, and was on with the new love before he was off with the old. It is an old trick of his. Mrs. Backhouse, who is sentimental, and vain into the bargain, naturally did not

like it. She poses as a martyr, and she is foolish enough to proclaim her misfortunes to all her intimate friends, who naturally think it far too good a joke to keep to themselves. But that is no reason why Mrs. Araby should chaff them both in public, especially with you there to hear it! Yes, it was brutal!'

Olivia sat shuddering in silence.

'After all,' continued her companion, alarmed at getting no response, 'it was nothing remarkable. Anyhow, it is no concern of yours, or of anybody's, except as a good joke. All the men do it. Poor Theresa Backhouse is not the first, nor will she be the last! As for Mr. de Renzi, he is such an old offender that everybody is delighted to see him caught at last. It was a triumph to catch him, a real triumph! I envy you!'

Olivia sprang to her feet with the gesture of one who shrinks from a revelation of horror.

'Now,' she cried, 'I see the point of Mrs. Araby's joke. Thank you for telling me. I agree with you. It was brutal!'

'I fear that I have shocked you,' said Miss Bond, in surprise at the vehement seriousness of Olivia's tone. 'You must not take things of that sort seriously.'

'No?' said Olivia. 'What, then, are the things which one ought to be serious about when one is going to be married? Is there anything?'

'Not, at any rate, the flirtations of your husband—past, present, or to come. That is the first law of modern married life. Society has decreed it. But do you mean that you knew nothing—nothing?'

'Nothing!' said Olivia. 'How should I? Those who should enlighten me conspire to keep me in the dark. What is there to know?'

'Forbid it, Innocence!' cried Miss Bond, 'that I should tell. I have told you too much already. Forget it. Ignorance is bliss; such bliss be yours. Here, by the way, is your happy lover approaching, who will owe me an eternal grudge if I rob him of a *tête-à-tête*. I will yield him my place before he discovers me.'

Miss Bond retreated to the house. De Renzi came and took her place. He was in his gayest mood. 'Olivia mia!' he cried, 'and by yourself—

'"a lady of the lake,
Sole sitting by the shores of old romance"—

waiting for me to come and be romantic in the moonlight. Tell me now, have you enjoyed it all, despite the rain?'

'Pretty well,' said Olivia; then suddenly turning to him, 'No, Claude, I will tell you the truth. I must do so. I have *not* enjoyed it. I have been wretched. I am in the depths of low spirits.'

De Renzi with difficulty repressed an outbreak of provocation at this unexpected announcement. 'Your spirits are capricious, Olivia. I hoped that you would be pleased. Everybody else has been delighted. You have had everything that human wit can contrive for your enjoyment. What could you wish more? What has been the matter?'

'You must forgive me,' said Olivia. 'I have been ill at ease. Good spirits will not come at command, not at *my* command at any rate.'

'Come now, you dear piece of perversity, admit the truth! You had resolved not to enjoy it, had you not?'

'No,' said Olivia; 'believe me. I was bound to try. I did try. But there are some things which are fatal to good spirits.'

'For instance?' asked De Renzi.

'A doubt, a suspicion in the heart of a woman who loves. If only you could clear them away from mine!'

'How can I,' cried her lover, 'when I have no notion of the cause? However, be the cause, the fancied cause, what it may, your doubts are baseless, the phantasm of imagination, the forgeries of jealousy!'

'Well, then,' said Olivia, 'I believe that I am jealous!'

'Jealous!' cried De Renzi; 'you jealous, and to me!'

'Yes,' said Olivia, 'that is one of the things that disquiet me. I am jealous.'

'Impossible,' cried De Renzi. 'It is a barbarous

passion, fit only for a blackamoor like Othello, and as obsolete as the megatherium. Forswear it, Olivia, I implore you. We shall never have a moment's peace. I am never jealous! I surrendered you to the duke, to Cosmo, this afternoon, without a pang. And jealousy to me—what a conception! Don't you know that I am fanatically in love with you, and care not a straw for all the other women in the world? What makes you doubt me? What can I do to still your doubts?'

Olivia was in no mood for banter. 'Do you know,' she said, 'that in all our intercourse you have never told me yet one single word about your past?'

'My past!' cried De Renzi, with a mock-heroic air. 'Horrid subject! It is dead, gone, forgotten; leave it to the dust, the ivy and the bats. I have buried it. Spare me a resurrection!'

'The women you have loved before you loved me—is there no one that I have a right to be jealous of?'

'The women that I have loved!' cried De Renzi with a laugh. 'Olivia, you touch a tender point; you press too far. Suffice it that you are despot, supreme and unquestioned, of a heart that owns no mistress but yourself. What need you, what would you have more?'

'I have just heard something,' said Olivia, whose seriousness of manner increased as De Renzi took refuge in levity, 'something which gives a solid form to doubts and suspicions that have been floating in my mind—in my heart. They have been gathering strength; they have been very strong to-day. I ought to tell it to you. It may be false.'

'It *is* false,' cried De Renzi with vehemence, 'if it is anything that impugns my devotion to you. Tell it me and let me reassure your confidence, since it needs reassurance.'

'You remember Mrs. Araby's attack on you this morning?'

'Yes,' said De Renzi, with some uneasiness in his tone; 'she is an old witch with the tongue of the devil. She ought to be drowned on a broomstick.'

'I have been told what she meant—that there is one whom, a few months ago, you were supposed to love, whom you led to love you, whom even now you regard with affection, who regards your marriage as a cruel desertion of herself and me as the robber of her rights. Tell me if it is so, that I may release you from your engagement.'

'This is too much,' cried De Renzi in a passion. 'You carry your rights too far. I will not be questioned by any one, Olivia, not even by you. There are things on which no man will—no man of honour ought to—submit to be catechised. I decline to say a word as to my past relations to any one, except that I was speaking the truth, as a loyal gentleman, when I offered you my love and asked for yours. There are some friendships which even marriage does not obliterate.'

'And the desertion?' asked Olivia. 'May I disbelieve that part of the story?'

'You must believe or disbelieve what you please,' said De Renzi. 'I decline to be questioned.'

'It is, surely, no unreasonable question,' said Olivia, 'standing as we do to each other.'

'That is as people think,' said De Renzi. 'Anyhow, I will not answer it.'

'That is answer enough,' said Olivia. Her voice had the solemnity of a death-sentence.

A gong sounded. Cosmo was standing at the window, and called them. De Renzi started to his feet. It was a welcome staving-off of a crisis, for which neither party was prepared. Both felt that it was a relief that their dispute should be peremptorily brought to a close.

'We must go,' De Renzi said. 'I will come to you the first thing to-morrow. You will feel differently then, I hope.'

Cosmo was awaiting them at the window. 'Forgive me,' he said, 'for interrupting you. Will you take Miss Hillyard in to dinner?'

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE STORM BURSTS

'Ah! what a vulgar thing does courage seem, when we see nations buying and selling it at a shilling a day. Ah! what a sublime thing does courage seem, when some fearful summons on the great deeps of life carries a man, as if running before a hurricane, up to the giddy crest of some tumultuous crisis, from which lie two courses, and a voice says to him audibly, "One way lies hope; take the other, and mourn for ever!" How grand a triumph if, even then, amid the raving of all around him and the frenzy of the danger, the man is able to confront his situation, is able to retire for a moment into solitude with God, and to seek his counsel from Him.'

THE worst and longest day has its end. Olivia saw the end of hers. The party had dispersed. The gentlemen had gone away to London, De Renzi amongst the rest. The lovely tea-gowns vanished with their owners. Peace reigned in the luxurious corridors of Cosmo's little palace—peace, and kindly sleep with its sweet anodyne for human woes. In one room of the villa, however, there was no thought of sleep, but the intense activity of throbbing pulses, overwrought nerves, excited brains. Mrs. Heriot had been all day on thorns about Olivia, first disappointed, next angry, finally alarmed. Olivia had belied the brilliant hopes that had been entertained on her behalf. She had tried in vain to hide her gloomy mood. She had not been brilliant, she had not been amusing, she had not been even cheerful. The gentlemen who tried to get on terms with her had retired in discomfiture. The duke, in the course of the morning had invited her for a stroll, but soon brought her back, and made no further effort at politeness. Mr. Cosmo could make nothing of her. Her rising reputation

had sunk to zero. Claude de Renzi must, Mrs. Heriot felt, be annoyed at his future wife playing so inglorious a part, so completely belying his expectations of what she might and would achieve. Such a lapse was inexcusable. Mrs. Araby's jokes at De Renzi had not, certainly, been in the best of taste; but girls must learn to take a joke, and even a neophyte in the mysteries of polite society might be expected to make allowance for Mrs. Araby. She was a chartered libertine in the matter of conversation. Her witticisms were too racy not to be condoned. Anyhow, resent it or not, as Olivia might think fit, she was bound, in the circumstances, to keep her resentment to herself. But she had shown temper, and shown it in the one way that was unforgivable, by being dull, by being a non-conductor to social electricity. The anxieties of a chaperon are—Mrs. Heriot ruefully acknowledged to herself, as she tapped at the door of Olivia's room—a great deal more serious than people, who have not the management of refractory young beauties, are accustomed to believe. Just now Olivia was in a refractory mood, and Mrs. Heriot was too anxious to sleep in peace without ascertaining explicitly to what extent her refractoriness had gone and was about to go.

Her worst anticipations were justified by Olivia's appearance. She was sitting, apparently, just where she had sat down when, half an hour before, she had entered the room. Her hair, which always seized the first opportunity of rebellion, was dishevelled; her eyes bore the mark of tears; her cheeks were pale; her appearance bespoke distress, agitation, the restlessness of perplexity, the courage of despair. Mrs. Heriot thought it well to veil the purpose of her visit by an air of indifference. She put down her candle and began at once to chatter as if she had merely come for a gossip.

'Are you dreadfully tired, Olivia? For my part, I am dead beat. The morning was so sultry, and thunder always upsets me; and what thunder! It rings in my head still. I shall not be able to sleep for hours, I am certain. But what a Providence that church was! We

saved our dresses, which is something; but, to tell the truth, I was terrified. I am an arrant coward about lightning when one is out of doors. That last flash actually blinded me. However, the whole thing was delightful, was it not? Cosmo is really perfect in his own house. You have got over your dislike to him by this time. But, Olivia, what is the matter with you? You sit there as white as a ghost; why don't you speak? Are you feeling faint?'

'No,' said Olivia, 'it is nothing; but I am as tired as you are. The day has been too long. I am overtired. I did not find the picnic as delightful as you did.'

'No?' said Mrs. Heriot. 'I was afraid you were not enjoying yourself. But they were all kind to you, were they not?'

'Kind!' cried Olivia. 'What kindness! I thought them detestable.'

'Come, come,' said her companion, 'is not that too sweeping? The American girl's slang is vulgar, of course, but that is the fun of it: and Mrs. Araby's jokes and stories! You must not think about them. She is an old offender, and a privileged one. She does it to every one; and no one minds. She has done it from time immemorial. I don't defend her. If it was any one but Mrs. Araby, people would call her a vulgar old wretch.'

'She *is* a vulgar old wretch,' cried Olivia with vehemence, 'and a cruel one. She tried to wound me, to insult me; she meant it; I could feel it. They are a hateful set, Isabella—bad, coarse, heartless. I have passed a miserable day, and am thoroughly wretched.'

'You are thoroughly tired,' said her companion, seriously apprehensive of a coming explosion, 'and so am I—too tired to discuss Mrs. Araby. All the same she was not meaning to be rude to you. She was only chaffing Claude —surely there was no harm in that.'

'No harm?' cried Olivia.

'No harm!' said Mrs. Heriot with a laugh, taking up her candle and preparing to depart. 'A little chaff hurts

no one; Claude as little as any. He deserves it. Good-night!'

'Stop,' cried Olivia; 'I have something to say to you. I had better say it at once. I will tell you what the harm is.'

'Well,' said Mrs. Heriot, coming back and shutting the door, conscious that the much dreaded crisis had arrived, 'what is it?'

'I have heard something to-day,' said Olivia, 'which entitles me to ask you a question. What is the story of Claude de Renzi and Mrs. Backhouse. What did Mrs. Araby mean this morning when she raised a laugh at his expense and mine, and Mrs. Backhouse's?'

'What?' said Mrs. Heriot. 'She meant, I suppose, that Claude de Renzi is about to unite himself to a most impetuous young lady. I wish him joy of you if you intend to behave as you are doing now.'

'You evade my question,' said Olivia. 'What has there been between them; there *is* something. You have concealed it from me, Isabella. You have not told me the truth. I learnt it to-day by accident. Am I to marry without knowing what it is? Am I to take him blindfold, not knowing whether he is mine, and if mine, when he became so? whether his heart is his own to give me. I have been feeling, for weeks past, that there was something wrong. I felt it most of all to-day. Claude de Renzi is not what I believed, nor am I what he thought. I shall never make him a good wife. Suppose that I were to break off my engagement, Isabella, may I look to you to help me?'

Mrs. Heriot felt the crisis to be indeed acute. She came and sat down on the sofa by Olivia. For some moments she could not say a word. Surprise, disappointment, anger, alarm, were too much for her. Olivia sat looking at her, intrepid, excited, insistent. At last she spoke. 'Break off your engagement? Olivia; you have taken leave of your senses; you must be wandering! you do not know what you are saying! It is impossible that you can be in earnest!'

'Earnest!' cried Olivia; 'never more bitterly in earnest.

It is a question of life or death for me. But would you help me?'

'Help you!' said Mrs. Heriot; 'you may rely upon it that neither I nor Valentine will ever let you do anything so mad! We will never allow it.'

'I feared that it would be so,' said Olivia. 'Have mercy on me, Isabella; I am alone in the world; I am in dire need of help; I must act for myself; it concerns myself alone'

'Yourself alone!' cried Mrs. Heriot, whose anger-storm was rapidly gathering to the bursting point of indignation; 'do you know what you are saying? what it is that you talk so glibly about doing? Do you know that it means your ruin, your loss of the best chance a girl in your position ever had—so good that I am constantly lost in astonishment at your good luck? It means disgracing yourself, disgracing us—insulting Claude de Renzi in the face of the world—alienating him—alienating his family—figuring before society as a mad woman! It is impossible, however. You are not yourself; you are overwrought. Go to bed now and to sleep, and wake up, please, in your right mind: but remember that, if by to-morrow morning this piece of lunacy has not quitted you, you will have to go to some other house than mine to commit this frantic act—to offer this gross affront to the man who has loaded you with kindness.'

'But my question,' said Olivia. 'Do you mean that there has been—that there is nothing between Claude de Renzi and Mrs. Backhouse that ought to make me hesitate if I knew it?'

Mrs. Heriot, in spite of her efforts to preserve an unaltered aspect, coloured up. 'I do mean it,' she said vehemently; 'are you going to listen to every piece of silly gossip that venomous tongues, like Mrs. Araby's, set agoing. Theresa Backhouse is an idiot, the worst sort of idiot, a sentimental one. If she chooses to imagine herself in love with De Renzi what has that to do with you or with him? Plenty of women, I daresay, have been in the same predicament. If she was not a fool she would not care to disgrace herself by such an exhibition. She likes to pose as broken

hearted. She has not sense to see that she is making herself ridiculous. Do you remember that she is a married woman?'

'Only too well,' said Olivia; but is it true, Isabella, that only a few months ago Claude de Renzi was in love with her?'

Mrs. Heriot's passion at last blazed out. 'How, in the name of common sense,' she cried; 'can I tell, or any one? And if he was, do you expect your husband to have been an innocent all his life, a nursery innocent? to have looked at no woman till you appeared upon the scene? to offer you a virgin heart? Believe me, such men exist nowhere but in goody story-books, nor such women either. They would not be worth twopence if they did. How long is it, Olivia, since you were, or believed yourself, in love with Jack? Think of that and be rational. At any rate be warned!'

Mrs. Heriot turned and left the room without another word. Olivia, again alone—her cousin's menace ringing angrily in her ear—set herself to review the position and to rally her resources of fortitude for this crisis of her fate.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

A LOVER'S DOUBT

'Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments: Love is not love,
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove.'

DE RENZI travelled home that Sunday night revolving many things. He had been aggrieved by the scene with Olivia—aggrieved and alarmed. She had revealed a new phase of character. De Renzi had no wish for a wife with a grievance—for a wife who would insist too rigidly on what she considered her rights, who would construe those rights exactingly, who would be unhappy if she considered that she did not get her due. The one thing which he did not intend to do in marriage was to put an inconvenient fetter on his personal liberty. He had no idea of domesticating a recording angel. He intended, by marrying Olivia, to increase his enjoyments, not to surrender his freedom.

Olivia's scruples, demands, doubts, might prove an awkward obstruction in the pleasant journey of existence. He admired, he loved her; but neither love nor admiration would carry him the length of submission to a domestic tyrant. He was making a romantically disinterested marriage. But how if the romance assumed an unexpected phase of severity, of strictness, of immoderate demands, of inconvenient scruples? Was it certain that Claude was not doing what of all things he, no less than his father, detested —making a bad bargain?

De Renzi could not think of his late interview with Olivia

without resentment. She had been unreasonable; her demands were outrageous. To comply with them would be a fatal surrender of all lawful liberties. Olivia was courageous; but then, if one was to marry a courageous woman, it would never do to begin by giving in to her whims, by submitting to defeat. Her husband must be courageous too. Olivia's demands about Mrs. Backhouse were a whim, a jealous whim. He would not gratify it, nor in truth *could* he. He was feeling tender, remorseful about Mrs. Backhouse. He was seriously sorry to have given her pain. Their last interview had been a painful one. Mrs. Backhouse had never looked more lovely; her beautiful azure eyes had filled with tears, and her voice had trembled with ill-suppressed emotion. De Renzi had no touch of the cynical brutality which could sneer at such emotion, or point a rough moral as to the rightful retribution which befalls a married woman who chooses to be idyllic. He had, he was forced to admit to himself, behaved badly to Mrs. Backhouse—badly according to his own standard of what was right, fair, permissible. He had shown her marked attentions the year before. Their mutual liking had been a recognised fact. Their intimacy—temporarily cut short by Olivia's appearance at the Pines—had speedily revived. It had ripened into a flirtation—unluckily, on Mrs. Backhouse's part, into something more. It was foolish and weak of her, no doubt; but this scarcely made it pleasant for De Renzi. For a time he had been really devoted to her, and had surrendered himself to the agreeable pastime of playing at love—of petting a woman whom nature intended to be petted. Now he had deserted her. She could never, of course, have supposed that their intimacy was to interfere with his marriage when the time arrived. But the time had arrived with unexpected promptitude. Their intimacy had closed with a cruel abruptness. Claude thought of it with regret and discomfort. Mrs. Backhouse chose to consider herself heart-broken, and, what was worse, to show the broken fragments of her heart to sundry friendly eyes. Nevertheless Claude would stand by her. Nothing should force him to belittle a woman to whom he had

paid attention, to ignore his past feelings for her. If, despite of them, he was prepared to marry her, Olivia ought to appreciate the value of the compliment. She could, in reason, demand no further sacrifice. On the other hand, if she proved exacting, unreasonable, and prepared, in case she could not get her own way, to break off the engagement, De Renzi determined that it would not be wise to oppose her resolution.

So ran De Renzi's thoughts as he journeyed Londonwards. On reaching home he went straight to his desk, took out Olivia's portrait, sat gazing at it for some instants, and straightway repented, in mental sackcloth and ashes, of his resentful mood. Give her up, indeed! Wayward, uncertain, exacting, oppressive—what you will—he loved her, and love welcomes every expedient rather than surrender.

CHAPTER XXXIX

FAREWELL

'Silvia is too fair, too true, too holy
To be corrupted by my worthless gifts;
When I protest true loyalty to her,
She twits me with my falsehood to my friend;
When to her beauty I commend my vows,
She bids me think how I have been forsworn
In breaking faith with Julia whom I loved.'

OLIVIA had spent a sleepless night in becoming more and more frightened. Had Claude met her responsively and sympathetically, the night before, she might still have been reassured, brought back to her allegiance, to hope and happiness, if not to absolute confidence. But the interview had done nothing but intensify her alarm, strengthen her conviction that she was going wrong, and that safety lay only in retreat. Her conversation with Mrs. Heriot had not tended to soothe her nerves or allay her apprehensions. No word on the subject passed as the two travelled up to town next day.

De Renzi came at the appointed time. His angry mood of the previous night had melted away. He was wishing only for reconciliation. The lover was once more in the ascendant. He had convinced himself that Olivia's jealous mood was excusable, the natural outbreak of lovable waywardness. It could be appeased; poor Theresa Backhouse's fancied wrongs could never be a serious ground of alienation to people who were as much in love as Olivia and himself.

De Renzi, as Olivia came into the room, looking miserable and frightened, yet beautiful, and bearing herself with

dignity, felt more than ever that to surrender her would be impossible.

Still, things would not go smoothly. Olivia was in a more difficult, a more uncompromising mood than on the previous day. She had been making up her mind. She saw clearly what she ought to do; she was nerved to do it. De Renzi felt speedily that the position was serious—defeat a not remote contingency.

'You must forgive me,' she said; 'you have done me many kindnesses. This will be the greatest of all. I have been to blame. Everybody else will blame me, I know. But you must understand and forgive. I told you that I had doubts. I put them aside. I hoped that they would vanish. I tried to believe that they had vanished. I was mistaken. They have still haunted me. Of late they have been stronger than ever. I have tried to silence them.'

'And in vain?' said De Renzi.

'In vain,' said Olivia, 'I feel greater doubts now than ever. I ought to tell you, ought I not?'

'Of course,' said De Renzi. 'What is the use of our going on with unexplained doubts between us? Are they doubts about me, or doubts about yourself? Yesterday your doubts were about me. I hope that I convinced you that they were groundless.'

'Doubts about us both,' said Olivia; 'gravest about myself. I distrust myself. I have told you so often. I have moods for which I cannot account—unknown currents that sway me. Of late I have been very unhappy—more unhappy, more anxious, more frightened than ever before in my life. I have been asking myself the cause.'

'And the answer?' said De Renzi.

'The answer, I believe, is that I am going wrong; we both are wrong. You are mistaken in me. I can never, I shall never be all you expect—all you see in me now, or did see in me a little while ago.'

'All I see now!' cried Claude. 'You are as charming to me as you ever were—as fascinating. But I am changed for you. I am not what you thought.'

'I was too dazzled to think,' said Olivia, 'to see, to

judge. You were so good to me—so kind; your praise was so sweet, your will so strong. My will bent before it. I took for granted that you must be right; but I ought to have known.'

'To have known what?'

'To have known that it was impossible for our lives to be in harmony. Our tastes, our beliefs, our standards, are worlds apart. I in my inexperience—you with your full knowledge of every side, except of the sort of life that I have lived—the only one I can live happily. You forgive me for speaking so?'

'Forgive!' said De Renzi; 'I am begging you to speak. For my part I do not know what these hopeless differences between us are. I know less of life than I supposed. What side of life is it which is so dear to you and a sealed book to me? Must it always remain a sealed book?'

'I was bred in a country home,' answered Olivia, 'and to village life. My father was a clergyman. We lived in retirement, he and I. I was always amongst the poor; we were very poor ourselves. Religion was our business, our inspiring thought, our consolation in many troubles, our hope. Many things are sacred to me which have no meaning to others; no meaning, I think, to you. Many things are dear, very dear to me, which are less than nothing to you. I have some fears, dreadful fears, which have no terrors for you. They have returned upon me with a vehemence which is like an inspiration. I dare not resist them. I should always be miserable if my life ignored them—if I allowed myself, as I have done too much of late, to live forgetting them. Yesterday brought it home to me. You meant it to be a day of happiness to me, of amusement, pleasure, success. It was a day of misery. I was wretched. The only happy moments I passed were those when I was kneeling in the little church, when we took refuge from the storm. I then learnt the cause of my unhappiness, and knew that I ought to ask you to release me. I beg you to do so.'

'It is no question of releasing,' said De Renzi; 'I am not

fool enough to rest any claim on your promise if your heart belies it. But think before you take a step which must turn the current of both our lives—which would be a cruel blow to me. Last night you mentioned another motive, a motive of jealousy. Are you sure that it is not that which is prompting you?'

'That,' said Olivia, 'is one of our differences; it is a fatal one. I am jealous, I admit. You think it absurd. But I could never alter as to that. I could never accept your view. You think it nothing that another woman is aggrieved at my happiness—a woman who was but so lately your friend, who loves you now, whom you perhaps still love. I should feel it sacrilege to accept happiness so offered. A curse would be on it and on me. I dare not. Will you release me?'

'Release you,' cried De Renzi, 'and on such a monstrous ground as that! Never, never! Why spoil both our lives for a fantastic whim of jealousy? for it is fantastic, Olivia—fantastic and baseless. I love and admire you as devoutly as ever woman was loved. You know that I am in love with you, fervently in love. You must know it. I offer you everything I have or shall ever have or be in life—I can do no more. What does it signify what I have been in former times before I loved you? What matter past friendships, past intimacies, past affections, supposing them to have existed? You have effaced them all. I swear to you that they exist no more. I am yours and yours alone. Why criticise my past? condone it; forget it, as I have forgotten it. If you love me as I do you——'

Olivia put up her hand with a deprecatory gesture, and De Renzi's outburst came suddenly to a standstill.

'What is it?' he asked.

'That "if,"' said Olivia; 'everything turns on that. I have been asking myself: such love as yours demands a careful search and an honest answer.'

'And the honest answer,' said De Renzi, turning pale, for he knew that he was close upon the crisis of his fate; 'tell me the truth.'

'I will tell you the truth,' said Olivia, 'I owe it to you;

it is the only reparation I can make. It is a humiliating confession.'

'Confession, indeed! I absolve you beforehand.'

'You can never do that,' said Olivia; 'my offence is unforgivable. When you speak of loving me as you have just spoken, I feel what a culprit I am; how guilty I have been. I have suffered, encouraged your love when . . . I cannot return it'

'I was a fool to say it!' cried De Renzi. 'Of course you do not feel for me as I do for you. How should you? It is not in nature that you should; but you must let me love you, worship you. You will be mine at last. Meanwhile I am content.'

'No,' said Olivia, 'believe me, it can never be. I have searched into my heart. I am confident now of what I suspected all along. I wished to love you; I wished to be your wife, to share your honour, your success, your triumphs. I admired you so much. I was delighted, dazzled, overpowered; I have felt many things towards you—gratitude, interest, admiration—but not love.'

De Renzi stood silent and motionless, his bloodless cheek alone betraying the intense excitement which he was struggling to conceal.

'Not love?' he said at last, 'and is it impossible that love should ever come? What is there in our past friendship that tells you that it is impossible?'

'You keep me on the rack,' said Olivia. 'Have mercy; forgive me, I entreat you, and set me free.'

'You are free,' said De Renzi; 'I will torture you no more. Bad as you deem me, I am not bad enough to take advantage of a woman's promise, nor fool enough to accept a wife who comes to me full of doubts, scruples and reluctance. Feeling as you do, you are perfectly right to break with me. It is well to do it before marriage instead of after.'

'Can you forgive me?' said Olivia.

'There is nothing to forgive,' said De Renzi. 'You have told me the truth; it is bitter, but I thank you for telling it. I shall think of you always as I have from the

first moment I saw you—as I do now—as the most perfect woman I have ever known. Olivia, good-bye.'

Olivia's eyes were swimming with tears; her hand lingered in De Renzi's.

'Good-bye,' she said in broken tones. 'You have been very good to me; you are very good to me now. You have my warmest gratitude.'

'Gratitude,' said De Renzi, 'is but the ghost of love. We do well to part. Farewell.'

CHAPTER XL

WAR IS DECLARED

> ' But, an' you will not wed, I'll pardon you—
> Graze where you will, you shall not house with me.
> Look to't, think on't, I do not use to jest.'

MRS. HERIOT began to feel that the fates were against her. Her husband, when she confided to him the awful intelligence of Olivia's recusancy, had displayed an unexpected independence, a view of the matter which was wholly unsympathetic, antagonistic to his wife's. It was another instance, Mrs. Heriot felt, of the way in which Valentine always failed her at a pinch. She could never screw his courage to the sticking place, or silence his inconvenient scruples. He now declared that Olivia must be left to do exactly what she pleased, and was, in no case, to be bullied.

'Bullied!' said Mrs. Heriot with some contempt in her tone, 'who wants to bully her? but warned, I presume, that she is making a fool of herself.'

'How do we know that she is making a fool of herself?' said Valentine; 'she is the only person to judge of that. It is her affair, not ours. Remember, Isabella, I will not have her bullied.'

Mrs. Heriot made no reply. It was no good to argue with such a mood. For herself, if bullying could have prevented Olivia from throwing away a splendid prize, in mere caprice, Mrs. Heriot would have applied the most drastic form of it within her reach. She despised her husband; she sometimes felt inclined to hate him; she hated him now. Once more he was falling short of what

might be expected of a reasonable being; and unreasonableness, especially in a person whom one is obliged to obey, is always hateful.

It was expedient, however, Mrs. Heriot felt, to approach Olivia with other methods than the off-hand brutality of the previous night. The only chance lay in being conciliatory; and Mrs. Heriot, who had been watching nervously for De Renzi's departure, came, a few minutes later, into the drawing-room with gentle tones and looks, bent evidently on a policy of conciliation.

Olivia was sitting where De Renzi had left her, looking the picture of despair.

'Well, Olivia,' Mrs. Heriot said, 'have you two young people made up your quarrel satisfactorily? Why, I should like to know, are lovers such a quarrelsome race?'

'It is no case of quarrel,' said Olivia disconsolately; 'it is all at an end, Isabella. Mr. de Renzi has been most kind to me about it, but he quite agrees with me that, feeling as I do, it is impossible for me to go on. It would be certain unhappiness for us both.'

'And you parted as friends?' asked Mrs. Heriot, fairly staggered by the explicitness of the announcement, and clinging to every remnant of hope in an almost desperate case.

'As good friends,' said Olivia; 'Mr. de Renzi thanked me for acting as I did.'

'He thanked you!' said Mrs. Heriot. 'Then reconciliation must be possible, surely?'

'We have nothing to reconcile,' said Olivia; 'we are agreed. I told him all my feelings about it.'

'What feelings?' cried Mrs. Heriot, with whom the warnings of prudence and her husband's injunctions were rapidly giving way before a gathering tempest of scorn and resentment: 'What feelings are these that have come so inconveniently to light at this stage of the proceedings? I have never heard of them before.'

'No,' said Olivia, 'I have done my best to conceal them from every one—from Mr. de Renzi, from you, from myself, unhappily, till now. Isabella, have compassion on

me! I have been disgracefully weak. I ought to have refused him at first: but I wished for him, I wished to love him. I told him then, I told you, that I felt in doubt. That feeling of doubt has never ceased. It has grown deeper and deeper. Now it fills me with terror; or rather, I doubt no more.'

'I cannot understand it,' said Mrs. Heriot; 'you have had a most happy courtship, surely—a devoted lover, a delightful one. What have you discovered?'

'I told you,' said Olivia, 'that, somewhere in my nature, a Puritan was stowed away.'

'A Puritan!' cried the other, more and more lost in amazement; 'what does it mean?'

'It means remorse, melancholy, terror, repentance, contempt for many of their ambitions, hatred for many of their pleasures, a dread of many things that they say and do with a light heart. It makes me unintelligible to those who have not got the key; unintelligible to myself sometimes. For weeks past I have lived in the midst of pleasures; they have been the saddest of my life. Since Mr. de Renzi released me I feel a burthen off my soul. It was crushing me.'

'And you really mean that for this—I do not know what to call it—this fit of Methodism, you have thrown away your chance, your splendid chance.'

'Seriously and finally,' said Olivia, 'Mr. de Renzi will, I am certain, never renew the subject. He released me, he forgave me. That is why I say he has been so kind.'

'He released you!' cried Mrs. Heriot aghast; 'Olivia, you are a most extraordinary girl and a most ungrateful one!'

'No,' said Olivia. 'Believe me. Mr. de Renzi does not think so, nor I hope will you.'

Mrs. Heriot burst into a scornful laugh.

'It is worse than ingratitude. You have made a fool of me. I have been a good friend to you. I have devoted time, strength, money, all to your advancement in the world. I have helped you to a splendid match. Meanwhile you have been amusing yourself by deceiving us all.'

'Deceiving you?' cried Olivia, starting to her feet.

'Deceiving me, Valentine, Mr. de Renzi, everybody. What do you suppose I brought you to London for?'

'I thought it was out of kindness,' said Olivia. 'It was very kind of you. You have been my good friend, as you say. I cannot thank you enough. I am grieved, most grieved, to have vexed you.'

'Vexed me!' cried Mrs. Heriot; 'and you come now and talk nonsense about your Puritan—nonsense that a child would blush at. Puritan indeed! You are a proficient, Olivia. I have known many women who are good hands at it, but you are the most accomplished flirt I have ever come across. You are a marvel. All London will be chattering about you this evening. But I will have no more of it. I give you till to-night to reconsider.'

'It is useless,' said Olivia, 'I have said the last word.'

'And this is my last word,' said Mrs. Heriot, passion and despair at last carrying everything before them; 'you are a mad woman, and your madness is of a dangerous species.'

'Spare me,' said Olivia, rising and moving towards the door; 'I am not feeling well. You have been very kind to me in times past. I am grateful, most sincerely grateful for your kindness. But that gives you no right to insult me now in my moment of trial.'

Mrs. Heriot—her cheek pale, her lips tight drawn, her steely gray eyes flashing—stood like a baffled fury. 'You remember what I said last night?'

'I remember it,' said Olivia, 'I will obey you.'

At this moment a servant announced that Dr. Crucible had called, and had sent up to know if Miss Hillyard was at home.

CHAPTER XLI

A FRIEND IN NEED

'Fain would I something say, yet to what end?
Thou hast nor ear nor soul to apprehend
The sublime motion and high mystery
And serious doctrine of virginity.
And thou art worthy that thou should'st not know
More happiness than is thy present lot.
Enjoy your dear wit and gay rhetoric,
That hath so well been taught her dazzling fence,
Thou art not fit to hear thyself convinced.'

DR. CRUCIBLE'S daily arrival at the Museum was a matter of absolute regularity. His occasional absences were events, the solemnity of which was emphasised by elaborate arrangements and formal notification. On this eventful Monday, however, without a note of warning, he failed to appear at his accustomed hour. A class of students which had assembled in the hope of enlightenment on the co-relation of Forces, waited, grumbled, and separated at last with muttered objurgations at their truant instructor's unexampled unpunctuality. When, several hours behind his time, the doctor put in an appearance, it was obvious that he was the victim of an agitation which not all his stoicism would enable him wholly to conceal. Something very unusual must, his alarmed subordinates surmised, have occurred to produce so marked a disturbance in the tranquil flow of Dr. Crucible's official life. Those who knew him, and did not know the potent forces that were at work, might well be lost in amazement. Was the doctor going out of his mind? or—what most of his friends would have con-

sidered much the same thing—was he going to be married? or what?

The truth was that Dr. Crucible had passed a most exciting morning. He was accustomed to pride himself on the well-adjusted existence of a philosopher; but before he had finished breakfast a letter had arrived from Olivia which upset his philosophic equilibrium beyond all hopes of recovery. Olivia always touched him in a tender spot. Ever since her visit to Lady Heriot they had been sworn friends. He had protested against her alliance with Mrs. Valentine Heriot as a deplorable defection—a mistake from which rude experience would, sooner or later, awaken her. He denounced her engagement as the scandalous achievement of Mrs. Heriot's worldly contrivance. Olivia now wrote in great distress. Her letter seemed like a cry for pity—for help. She was in the most dreadful difficulty. She had at last, she said, after many searchings of heart, made up her mind that her engagement must be broken off. Every one would, she well knew, oppose her change of mind and condemn it; and no wonder. No one would understand the cause. Mrs. Heriot, especially, to whom she was under great obligations, was furious at the bare suggestion. The prospect was alarming. There was a dreadful time before her to go through, a dreadful battle to fight. 'I am alone; I have no friend here; I have no adviser; no one to sympathise; no one to help me. Such friends as I have will all be against me. Isabella Heriot will be turned from friend to foe. I dread encountering her. I am to be sent away unless I submit; but I can never submit. Will you come and see me?'

The note of distress throughout the letter was acute. It moved the doctor to his heart's core. It appealed to all his paternal fondness for Olivia; but it did something more—it filled him with the exultation of an ardent warrior, who knows that the long-desired moment of combat has at last arrived. It sounded a very tocsin in his ears. It was a trumpet-call for the assault, the assault that he had so long panted to deliver, that he had so often, in thoughts to which the wish was father, imagined himself delivering.

Dr. Crucible did not like De Renzi. He cordially detested Mrs. Heriot. He had discussed all the story of the will with Lydia Hazelden, and unhesitatingly espoused her prejudices and convictions on the subject. He was satisfied that the codicil had been brought about by some infamous means, and that Isabella was the culprit. His old friend's last hours had been darkened, her real intentions defeated by this abandoned schemer. Sir Adrian's fortunes had received a mortal blow. His favourite, Jack, had been vilely ousted from his rights. The doctor's soul grew black whenever the subject crossed his thoughts. He predicted the most awful retribution on Mrs. Heriot's guilt. Metaphorically speaking, he thirsted for her blood. He would have liked to put his foot upon her neck—that much admired, much bedizened neck. His vengeance had hitherto been restricted to an impotent indulgence in abuse of the object of his wrath—calling her Canidia, Messalina, Borgia, and other evil names behind her back. But he was now to meet Canidia face to face. *Væ victis!* Dr. Crucible summoned a hansom, and drove away merrily for the battle-field, and arrived opportunely as the encounter between Mrs. Heriot and Olivia had reached that critical stage at which the intervention of a third party would turn the fortunes of the day.

CHAPTER XLII

STONEHOUSE DENOUNCES A JOB

'Avouons au moins que nous devons à l'infortune le plus cher de nos rêves, celui du bonheur : car un sourire n'est qu'une larme qui sèche : la joie n'est qu'un chagrin qui se calme.'

THAT night Dr. Crucible and Stonehouse were dining together at the Parthenon, and Crucible, proud of his morning's achievement, and of the possession of a really interesting piece of gossip, lost no time in communicating it to his companion.

'Have you heard about De Renzi?' he asked. 'His match with the young beauty is broken off. You remember her two years ago in Seymour Street?'

'Remember her?' said Stonehouse. 'Do you think I am a stock-fish? I had the honour of taking her to the play—a charming girl, bright, clever and good—too good for the De Renzis to smelt in their gold-pots. I hope that she is not broken-hearted about it?'

'Broken-hearted!' cried Crucible; 'it is *she* that has broken off the match. She found that she did not like him.'

Stonehouse poured out a glass of port with an air of mock solemnity.

'I drink to her good health. I applaud her courage; it is a courageous act.'

'I join in the toast,' said the doctor, gleefully replenishing his glass. 'If she cares about money, there are plenty of young plutocrats with as much fortune as De Renzi and a better reputation.'

'Yes,' said Stonehouse,

'"Uno avulso, non deficit alter
Aureus, et simili frondescet virga metallo—"

The golden tree of London has a never-failing supply of precious branches. May she find one to her taste!'

'I do not join in that,' said Crucible; 'for my part I should like her to marry her cousin, Jack Heriot, who has been in love with her ever since he was a lad.'

'Ah,' observed Stonehouse, 'but that won't do. Master Jack has got to put to something in the family pot. If he wants to keep Huntsham, he must find some of these golden young ladies to keep house with—somebody who, besides looking pretty, will pay his butcher's and baker's bills for him.'

'Humph!' said the doctor, 'I should have thought that the Heriots had had enough of that sort of thing, with Valentine's experience and his stucco wife. I saw that horrible woman this morning. She has pillage written in her eyes—pillage and fury! She fought like a very dragon, but I rescued Andromeda.'

'And what have you done with her now that she is rescued?' asked Stonehouse; 'your rescued heroine is apt to be embarrassing to her deliverer. Have you got her on the premises? Because, if so, I will come home to tea with you.'

'Profane!' said Dr. Crucible. 'I have handed her over to Mrs. Hazelden, who consented, like a good angel, to befriend her. She needs a refuge and consolation. The encounter with the dragon has shattered her:'

'And the loss of a lover!' said Stonehouse; 'but she will recover, you will see; Andromedas of twenty generally do. How delighted old Sir Raphael will be! Everybody will vow that he contrived it.'

'But about Jack Heriot now,' said Crucible; 'he cannot go on all his life playing at art and socialism. It is not respectable. Fancy a Heriot in a velveteen jacket with his hair down his back!'

'We live in an epoch of revolution,' said Stonehouse; 'if young Heriot chooses to let down his back hair, I should

not concern myself. The Spartans did it before their battles. Artists live and prosper nowadays. They immortalise Lord Mayors and smart ladies—they illustrate the magazines, and, I observe, the advertisements. Millais's boy is for ever blowing Pears's soap-bubbles in my face. I am haunted, on my road to chambers every morning, by a colossal atrocity, who leers at me over several acres of naked shoulder, amid a Niagara of golden hair. I dare-say some fellow got well paid for painting her. Why should not Jack make a living at it?'

'It is a Bohemian existence,' objected Crucible.

'I like the Bohemians,' replied Stonehouse; 'we want more of them. Human life is growing too precise. We are all of us infernal prigs. Respectability, as some one said of the Boston streets, stalks amongst us unabashed.'

'Well,' said Crucible, 'the long and the short of it—if you will have it—is that I have another plan in my head for him. Should you be surprised to hear that Lord Melrose has carried his way with the Museum Commissioners, and that they have, at last, consented to allow me a librarian?'

'Stop!' cried Stonehouse, 'I refuse to listen. Thou corrupter of youth, thou jobber! Tell not your nefarious deeds of darkness to an honest man over his port.'

'A librarian,' continued Crucible, quite unabashed by the other's invective, '£500 a year, quarters in the Museum, and as many coals and candles as you please. The only difficulty is to find the proper man. Lord Melrose is good enough to leave the nomination entirely to me.'

'Well,' said Stonehouse, 'and what are the essentials of a librarian? Youth, ignorance, flightiness, to have thrashed a policeman, to be son of a broken-down baronet and the lover of a pretty girl. Can such a man be found? By the way, are you sure that Jack Heriot can read? It is desirable, I believe, that a librarian should possess that accomplishment.'

'Read!' cried Crucible with scorn; 'a librarian—*my* librarian, must have a touch of genius; he must not be a

pedant; he must not be a bore; he must be young, or he will not be malleable, and malleability is indispensable; he must be a gentleman; he must be a scholar; he must be a university man, a cultured man, a companionable man, with whom I can go and chat about the books——'

'And,' said Stonehouse, 'he must have a charming young wife, with whom you can go and chat about the babies! Thou double-dyed jobster, deem not that thou wilt escape unscathed! A virtuous press shall expose thy iniquity—a virtuous patriot, one Stonehouse to wit, shall denounce thee to a shuddering senate—"Quosque tandem, Crucibille, nostrâ abutere patientiâ?" Society ——'

'Society,' said Crucible, 'will come to tea, and talk about the babies. Providentially there is a gallery, now wasted on fossils, which can be cut up into a nursery when the time arrives. I have arranged it already.'

'Well,' said Stonehouse, 'it is a fortunate thing for the young, amorous and improvident, that there are some men who will stick at nothing in the shape of crime—"Ces amis de famille sont capables de tout." But since you will do it, you may as well have my blessing on the job. Have you told the young person?'

'Jack Heriot? I am to see him to-morrow. As likely as not he will refuse it.'

'As likely as not,' said Stonehouse, 'he will do nothing of the kind, especially when he hears about the nurseries.'

'His first question,' Crucible said sententiously, 'will, I know, be as to his fitness for the post. He is excessively conscientious.'

'Of course,' said Stonehouse, 'that always is the first question with the lucky one whose friends job him into a sinecure. What a comfort that he is so fit! Once in harness he will go straight enough, no doubt.'

'He will never go straight,' said Crucible, 'if by "straight" you mean humdrum; but he is none the worse for that! He will never be humdrum! He has ideas and aspirations of his own—a something in his head, a touch of poetry, a touch of originality. He is a nympholept! Sometime or other he has caught sight of an unearthly presence

flitting through the forest glades, a glimpse of a white flowing skirt——'

'A glimpse of Olivia's petticoat,' cried Stonehouse with irreverent bursts of laughter. 'He'll catch her fast enough when once you have given him the place. Meantime, when the papers attack you, you can explain that he is a nympholept. It is a new apology.'

'And no bad one,' said Crucible; 'I am one of the old school in love matters, and believe that the best chance for a young fellow is to have an ideal—an ideal woman, and to be resolved to win her.'

'You are a nympholept yourself,' cried Stonehouse, 'and a match-maker to boot. I daresay you have already been conspiring with Master Jack.'

'Conspirators,' said Crucible with complacency, 'are not in the habit of disclosing their plots at their clubs after dinner. We shall see what will come of it.'

The truth was that Crucible had already written to Jack to come and see him, and the next morning that young gentleman, who had long found the doctor an excellent confidant, made his appearance at breakfast-time, and was skilfully prepared by his host for the fateful announcement. He was, as it happened, in the depths of low spirits.

'How goes the world with you, Jack, and your painting?' the doctor asked; 'is the masterpiece forthcoming?'

'The masterpiece!' cried Jack, disconsolately, 'I am just learning enough to know what masterpieces mean, and why it is that only one man in a million achieves one, and why I never should if I tried for a century. The fact is, doctor, to do anything respectable in art you must have genius. Few are the happy ones who possess it! I have not a touch of it. I can ride, I can shoot, I could dig if I got the chance, but paint I cannot. I can be nothing but a drudge, and the drudges are too numerous already. What does it matter? It is only one knock the more. I have had some hard ones, have I not? I have put a bold face on it, but, to tell you the truth, I feel rather beaten.'

'Never say die,' cried the doctor; 'you are not beaten

yet, Jack, or within a hundred miles of it. Who knows when the luck will turn?'

'How can the luck turn for me?' said the other; 'and why should I care about its turning? I ought to care, I suppose; but I am hard hit, very hard. I went to see Olivia the other day, and take her my wedding offering. I have had a bad time since then. I ought not to have gone, but, like a fool, I went; I could not help it. I have paid dearly for my folly. I love her ten times more than ever. She was sweet to me. She spoke with tears in her eyes. I believe she is being forced into it. Aunt Valentine is forcing her. I am powerless to save her.'

'Well,' said the doctor, who considered that the proper moment for the revelation had arrived, 'now I have something to tell you. She has saved herself. She sent for me yesterday about it. She has broken off her engagement.'

'She has!' cried Jack, jumping up and seizing the doctor's hand, 'thank God for that; and thank you for telling me. You are sure? Aunt Isabella is a deep one.'

'You are right, Jack, your aunt is a deep one. I had the satisfaction yesterday of seeing her, for once, out of her depth. It is a bad business for Olivia though, is it not? What will become of her, poor girl?'

'Ah!' cried Jack, flushing hot with excitement and already on the sunny pinnacles of hope, 'but she is well out of that business at any rate. It was Canidia's contrivance. I saw it all along. She would never have been happy. I know him and I know her. It would have been an unhappy marriage.'

'Well,' said the doctor, 'she is resolved at any rate not to make the experiment. She is not likely to get another chance of making it again in a hurry. Young millionaires and rising statesmen are not to be had for the asking. De Renzi is an enormous catch.'

'De Renzi,' cried Jack, 'is a—but no; he is a trump—an angel for letting her find him out in time and for giving her a lesson. He will have sickened her of wealth.'

'Who knows?' said the doctor, who was not incapable

of a teasing mood; 'perhaps she has a still richer man in her eye. Girls have done such things before now.'

'You know she has nothing of the sort,' cried Jack; 'she is as good as gold.'

'She means to be a duchess,' said his persecutor; 'I am convinced. Why not? There are several young marquesses available. She wants a dukedom.'

'She wants a fiddlestick,' cried Jack. 'She has not defied Aunt Isabella and all her works for that.'

'But now for business,' said Crucible; 'I did not send for you to discuss Olivia's love affairs.'

'Did you not?' cried Jack, who at that moment was incapable of fancying anything else in the world that could so well deserve discussion; 'then what did you want me for?'

'I want you for business,' said the doctor, 'a business matter of importance. I want your assistance. I have a post to give away. I have been commissioned to look out for a librarian for the Museum. The work will be heavy; the salary is small; £500 a year and quarters in the building. Probably only a man devoted to science for its own sake would be prepared to make the sacrifice of accepting it. Can you help me to a choice?'

. . . . . .

Jack went away presently, the happiest, hopefullest young fellow in London. The luck had turned indeed. His troubles were forgotten. Life lay before him, rosy with delightful possibilities. The world had suddenly grown bright. Hope flooded the scene with golden rays. Olivia was free. Olivia might yet be won. 'Never say die' indeed! No one of all the thousands of stalwart lads, who hurried through London's streets that morning to their daily task at the great wheel of life, felt less like saying it.

A week later Jack was established at the Museum in a wilderness of learned volumes, and had set himself manfully to the task of reducing them to order. Crucible took him over the Museum and explained to him the geography of his new home.

'What is this?' asked the new librarian, as they passed

into a long gallery, to which piles of fossils, heaped about in chaotic profusion, gave a neglected air; 'is this part of my kingdom?'

'Not at present,' said the doctor; 'these are some palæozoic friends of mine and have no business here at all. I intend to replace them by some of the more recent mammals. Some day, if the librarian should be a married man and should happen to require it, this will be the nursery.'

CHAPTER XLIII

DR. CRUCIBLE AS A DIPLOMATIST

'I cannot love him;
Yet I suppose him virtuous, know him noble,
Of great estate, of just and stainless youth,
In voices well divulged, free, learned, valiant,
And in dimension and the shape of nature
A gracious person: but yet I cannot love him;
He might have took his answer long ago.'

No one ever knew, for Crucible refused to divulge them, the details of the encounter between Mrs. Heriot and himself. It is certain, however, that the doctor stood to his guns like a man, undeterred by Mrs. Heriot's wrath, and that the battle ended in his carrying off Olivia in triumph to his chambers in the Albany. Having established his guest in such comfort as bachelor quarters allow, the doctor started off to Mrs. Hazelden's to enlist that lady's assistance in disposing of his guest.

Dr. Crucible had need of all his diplomacy and all the weight of an old-standing family friendship when he essayed to induce Mrs. Hazelden to give Olivia a refuge. She came from a suspicious quarter — a deserter from the enemy's camp. Of all houses in London her sister-in-law's was the last to which Mrs. Hazelden would naturally have gone to find a friend or a dependant. Isabella, if she was nothing worse, was the incarnation of vulgar smartness. She was showy, she was worldly, she was unscrupulous; everything, in fact, that a young girl's guardian ought not to be. She had adopted Olivia, and given her a couple of years of her precious advice and example.

'Olivia,' Mrs. Hazelden now said decisively, must by this time be completely spoilt.'

'I tell you,' said the doctor gallantly, 'that nothing could spoil her, not even such a chaperon as Mrs. Heriot. Does her behaviour look like it? She is as good now as she was two years ago, when your mother was so fond of her.'

'I have no time for maidens all forlorn,' said Mrs. Hazelden; 'no time and no taste. They are quite out of my line. I don't like love affairs, unsuccessful ones least of all. I should not know what to do with her.'

'But what am *I* to do with her?' pleaded Crucible. 'You cannot leave a young creature like that to shift for herself.'

'She will flirt with my boys,' said Mrs. Hazelden. 'She will turn their foolish heads, as once upon a time she turned poor Jack's.'

'Happily,' said the doctor, 'the big ones are away, and the little ones are too little to be in any danger; but she will teach them as much Greek and Latin as you please.'

'If she can do that she will be a benefactress,' cried Mrs. Hazelden; 'it is more than I can do. They are idle little rascals, spoilt with soft living and too many holidays. As for learning anything, they cannot even spell their mother tongue.'

'Olivia will soon put that to rights. Spelling is one of her strong points. She has so many.'

'A first-rate champion among the rest,' said Mrs. Hazelden. 'She is a paragon, no doubt; but paragons are troublesome inmates. Why should I undertake her?'

'Why?' cried Crucible; 'because, my dear lady, she is in trouble and needs your help, and deserves it. Your mother loved her; she would have rejoiced to help her. Do as she would have done. Show what you think of Isabella Heriot's proceeding in turning her adrift. I can conceive nothing that she would dislike so much as that you should harbour Olivia just now.'

'Then I will certainly do so,' said Mrs. Hazelden, pleased to find a cross-grained excuse for a good-natured act; 'you may bring her when you please.'

'You are a good woman!' cried Crucible, seizing her hand; 'your mother's true daughter. I will go and bring her to you at once. God bless you for helping her!'

. . . . . .

Olivia soon satisfied her hostess that she had not been spoilt. She carried herself bravely, and betrayed not the slightest symptom of being broken-hearted. No one could have worn less of the air of the maiden all forlorn. She set to work in real earnest with the two small boys, who were at home for the holidays, and who speedily declared themselves ready to do anything, even vulgar fractions and dictation, that Olivia wished. Mrs. Hazelden, after holding her at arm's length for some days, at last threw away her suspicions and began to grow confidential. Olivia found herself surprised into the awful topic of her engagement.

'Do you think I was excessively to blame?' Olivia ventured, with some trepidation, to inquire.

'Excessively,' said Mrs. Hazelden; 'you have let a fine fortune slip out of your fingers, and spoilt one of Isabella's plans! How can I forgive you? But, seriously, Olivia, do you wish to know what I think about you?'

'Yes,' said Olivia; 'that is, if it will do me good to know it. But remember, please, that I am in need of consolation, not reproach. I can do that for myself.'

'Well,' said Mrs. Hazelden, suddenly growing serious, 'I will tell you. If my esteem, Olivia, my warm regard, my hearty sympathy and approval will console you, you may be consoled. Do I think you to blame, indeed? Do I think courage to blame, and reason, and honour, and the brave resolve to save yourself, at whatever cost, from a life of unhappiness and turpitude.'

'Turpitude!' cried Olivia.

'It is a strong word,' said the other, 'is it not? but none too strong for the lives that women like Isabella Heriot lead,—their aims, their motives, their pleasures. She wanted to make them yours, Olivia. Your peril was great. I rejoice to think that you have escaped. You are meant for better things; they will come in due time.'

'You are a good consoler,' said Olivia, laying her hand fondly on Mrs. Hazelden's; 'some of the good things have come already. I feel stronger and better for my life with you. I am happy here. You will always be my friend, will you not?'

'Always,' said Mrs. Hazelden, 'so long as you do not make friends with the mammon of unrighteousness. When you do that you will have to give me up. The mammon of unrighteousness of our day is, to my taste, bad of its kind—sordid, despicable, to be abhorred. You have seen it; you know enough.'

'I know enough,' said Olivia, 'to wish to know no more. Isabella preached me a rough lesson.'

'A rough lesson,' said the other, 'and a wholesome one. She is a sermon in herself, a brilliant instance, a true daughter of her age—the age of self-indulgence.'

CHAPTER XLIV

VETERIS VESTIGIA FLAMMÆ

'But besides those, who make good in our imagination the place of Muses and of Delphic sibyls, are there not women who fill our vase with wine and roses to the brim, so that the wine runs over and fills the house with perfume: who inspire us with courtesy; who unloose our tongues and we speak; who anoint our eyes and we see? We say things we never thought to have said; for once our walls of reserve vanished, and left us at large; we were children playing with children in a wide field of flowers. "Steep us," we cried, "in these influences for days and weeks, and we shall be sunny poets, and will write out in many-coloured words the romance that you are."'

WHETHER Mr. Emerson's high-flown description of the charming woman's influences on human nerves and brain was a day-dream of his own poetic temperament, or is a veracious portraiture of processes which actually occur among mortals, is a question which, for obvious reasons, it is expedient to leave undetermined. Few men, certainly, are known to their contemporaries to go about in this ecstatic plight with loosened tongues and bliss-anointed eyes, crying out to be steeped in celestial influences. But then it is possible that the women, capable of producing such delicious enthralment, may also be few. That such women exist is certain. Every man probably knows one at least, and tastes differ. M. Sainte Beuve, who ought to know, declares it to be impossible to write about women without first putting oneself in a good humour by thinking of Madame de Sévigné. Madame de Sévigné's husband, on the other hand, did not care about her. Rousseau, at the time he was firing the sentiment of Europe, declared his Theresa delightful, despite her dirt, ignorance, and stupidity;

as afterwards, no doubt, did Theresa's second lord, the congenial stable boy. Be this as it may, Jack Heriot was enthralled. Olivia was his muse, his sibyl, his inspiring genius, his all-dominating influence. When he was with her his rose-crowned cup ran over with bliss. When he left her he carried away an enchanted memory. The only drawback was that the period of existence, during which he had to content himself with the pleasures of memory, was so vastly in excess of that in which the actual fruition of his adored one's presence was vouchsafed. Olivia was but seldom to be seen. His aunt's door was not open to him with the ready hospitality of other times.

'Now, Jack,' Mrs. Hazelden had said in her brusque fashion, 'don't you be coming here too often; I cannot have idle boys about the house.'

'I am not an idle boy,' said Jack, 'but a studious man —tremendously studious.'

'And so is Olivia,' said his aunt; 'she is busy with the children's lessons and her own, I should hope. She is trying to catch up all the time your aunt has made her work. She wishes to study.'

'Yes,' said Jack, 'I have seen her studying—

> "'a student air,
> With a look half sad, half saintly,
> Grave sweet eyes, and flowing hair"—

Aunt Lydia, don't be hard upon me. I am a fool. I cannot help it. She is a woman to worship.'

'Jack, dear fellow,' said his aunt, looking at him with kindly, compassionate eyes, 'take my advice, and don't come here too often, and, still more, don't be too affectionate, "Chi va lento, va sano: chi va sano, va lontano"—one false step and you will spoil your chance.'

'Then,' said Jack, catching at the first straw which offered, 'you think I have a chance?'

'No,' said his aunt, 'I did not mean that. I meant that you may make it impossible that you ever should have one. I came upon a good remark somewhere the other day which I commend to you, namely, that men are slow, in

their conceit, to recognise what a valuable ally in their love-making they might make of distance. It lends enchantment to the view.'

'Distance!' cried Jack. 'That is a bitter remedy.'

'Most good remedies are,' said his aunt. 'If you want her, Jack, go the right way about it, and begin by not being in a hurry! Olivia is in no mood just now for love-making. Come when I ask you. You do really want her, don't you?'

'Want her!' cried Jack, who was by this time perfectly incapable of talking rationally on the subject—'Want her! Ah, Aunt Lydia, if you only knew how much, and for how long I have wanted her! You must help me, will you not?'

'Well,' said his aunt, 'I am helping you now, when I tell you to make yourself reasonably scarce, and not to waste my mornings and hers. Ah, there is the bell! As you are here, I must, I suppose, allow you to stay for lunch.'

It had always been part of Jack's boyish creed that, despite her austerity of doctrine, his Aunt Lydia was, *au fond*, 'a brick.' Never had he more heartily subscribed to that belief than now; and while he was still mentally blessing her, Olivia came in from a walk in the park with the children, looking like a young goddess—fresh, radiant, beautiful, raining her genial influences in generous profusion on all around her—firing Jack's young blood, filling his heart with a thrill of admiration, a rush of eager desire and hope. 'Want her?' 'Wait for her?' Live for her, die for her! What was he not ready to do, to dare, to suffer, if only this fair creature might one day be his!

One practical step towards the accomplishment of his happiness it was open to Jack to take forthwith. It was a relief to take it. When he went, next day, to Huntsham to tell his parents of the good fortune which, by Crucible's intervention, had befallen him, Lady Eugenia thought it incumbent on her, as a good mother, to improve the occasion by renewing the suggestion which she had often

heretofore made in vain—that Jack's way to comfort and happiness lay in the direction of a judicious marriage. She had several young ladies on her list, all of whom she considered eligible. Jack, she was convinced, as became a partial mother, could not fail to be a welcome wooer. Now, too, besides an agreeable person and a prospective baronetcy, Jack had the additional recommendation of a respectable official post to offer to the destined sharer of his affections. It seemed more than ever equitable that the young lady, honoured by Jack's selection, should, on her part, bring an equivalent in the shape of solid wealth.

'It is what everybody has to do,' Lady Eugenia said; 'what in fact everybody, not born to a fortune, does. How else, I should like to know, is a gentleman to live?'

Lady Eugenia, in numberless communings with her own heart on the subject, had convinced herself that no satisfactory answer could be given to this question, and, accordingly, that her point was proved. It was a surprise, a mortification, now to find that it carried no conviction to Jack's too stubborn understanding.

'How is a gentleman to live?' he said in disrespectful tones. 'By earning a livelihood, like an honest man, or, if he cannot do that, by going without it. Worse things might happen.'

'Well,' said Lady Eugenia, her armoury of argument fairly exhausted, 'you do not suppose you can live on £500 a year, do you?'

'Why not?' cried Jack. 'Anyhow, I mean to try, and to get Olivia to try with me, if I can. Do not talk to me, please, about any other girl. I don't care a straw for one of them; it is Olivia or nobody for me. I have waited a long time, mother; I have done all that you and father asked me; now you must take my part. I can never give her up.'

Lady Eugenia was an easy conquest, and once conquered became a vigorous ally. Sir Adrian showed more obduracy. His mind was difficult to move. He hated the idea of Olivia as a daughter-in-law. She had gone over to the enemy. Such a defection was unforgivable. She had

joined Isabella Heriot, had become her dependant, had accepted her favours, and had, no doubt, imbibed her principles. Who could tell what baneful arts, what vile and dangerous secrets that abandoned worldling might not have taught her? Her engagement to De Renzi implied a sordid ambition, her breach of it a fickle temper. Sir Adrian committed himself more and more zealously to the task of proving that Olivia could never make a decent wife. He disparaged her good looks. There were too many good-looking women, he protested, whose husbands had the worst of the bargain. Then Jack flew into a passion and declined to discuss the subject any more. The crisis was unprecedented in the family annals. Jack and his father had never had a real quarrel before, and this quarrel was a desperate one. Jack was in an implacable mood. His father's rough phrases had stung him to the quick. He would never, Lady Eugenia felt certain, give in. Could it be expected that he should? Many evil things had befallen Sir Adrian, but that his son should leave the house in open rebellion! What might not happen next?

Lady Eugenia betook herself nervously to the delicate task of reconciliation; but Sir Adrian was not easy to be reconciled.

'She is Isabella's *protégée*, her creature,' he said in stubborn tones,—'Isabella, my worst enemy and Jack's.'

'She has broken with Isabella,' cried his wife; 'she has given up everything sooner than submit to her schemes. What could she do more? Lydia, who is a good wife, you will admit, is delighted with her. Pray, Adrian, do not put yourself in the wrong with the best, the most loyal son that ever lived. Life would be unendurable to me.'

The result of Lady Eugenia's diplomacy was that Jack succeeded in obtaining his father's consent to his engagement, and that, a few days later, several luggage vans were despatched, loaded with a goodly supply of Chippendale chairs and tables, which had been for years wasting their sweetness in the lumber-rooms of Huntsham, and were now destined for the embellishment of Jack's quarters in the Museum. Sir Adrian was reconciled to the idea of Olivia

as a daughter-in-law. It had been decreed in the family councils that Jack was now to become a married man as soon as the Fates, who sway the female heart, permitted that delightful consummation. Everything now depended on the Fates and on Olivia.

CHAPTER XLV

LAST DAYS AT HUNTSHAM

'Of all the paths which lead to woman's heart,
Pity's the straightest.'

OLIVIA had now for a year had her home at Mrs. Hazelden's. The silent flow of uneventful months, none of which brought change or cheerfulness to the situation, was at last interrupted by a crisis, sufficiently acute to mark a new departure. One day Mrs. Hazelden came into Olivia's room in unusual excitement, with a letter in her hand. 'I have had agitating news this morning,' she said. 'A purchaser has been found for Huntsham; in a few days, my brother writes, the sale will be completed. If I wish to visit my old home once more I must go at once. I mean to go to-day, to say good-bye to the place I love best on earth. I am weak about it, I know, Olivia; but it grieves me to the quick. It is hard on us all. It has been a dear, dear home. I love it more than I knew I did, more I suppose than a reasonable being ought; anyhow it is going!'

'And Jack!' cried Olivia; 'he will mind it dreadfully. What a sacrifice! He was right to do it; was he not? but how hard it seems!'

'He was right,' said Mrs. Hazelden, 'if the honest, the chivalrous thing is the right one, which sometimes I begin to doubt. Jack is chivalrous to the core—the soul of honour. Such men come off badly in the world. Fancy him and his father without a home.'

The tears stood in Mrs. Hazelden's eyes. Her lips trembled. She spoke in broken tones. She was greatly

moved. Olivia had never seen this sturdy woman so little mistress of herself. For once her habitual stoicism failed her.

'It is cruel for you all,' said Olivia, sitting down by her companion; 'a dreadful loss. I can share it. I have such pleasant memories of Huntsham. What happy visits I have paid there as a child! It was there the great good fortune of my life befell me—Lady Heriot's friendship.'

'Dear mother!' said Mrs. Hazelden, 'it is well that she is in her grave. It would have broken her heart. She loved the old place. How fond she was of you, Olivia!'

'She was very good to me,' said Olivia; 'my life with her was delightful; it is delightful to remember. How happy my father used to be with Sir Adrian! Ah, if one could only have those dear people, those happy days again!'

'Come, come,' cried Mrs. Hazelden, 'do not let us be sentimental. I must go about my housekeeping. My train goes at twelve. What is the good of looking back? As for you, Olivia, you are too young for such wishes. You must look forward. Life is full of promise to you—promise of happiness. You are happy here, are you not?'

'Most happy,' said Olivia, with emphasis—'most happy, and most grateful to the best of friends. I should be a wretch if I were not. Yet I am often sad, I do not know why. I miss my father dreadfully: no one can ever be what he was to me. Sometimes I think my loss grows worse to me as time goes on. Now you are in trouble; it grieves me. Life is a bad business, is it not?'

'No,' said Mrs. Hazelden, getting up resolutely and turning to Olivia as she prepared to leave the room, 'not to the young, the hopeful, the courageous. Take courage, Olivia, I prophesy a life of happiness for you.'

'Kind prophetess!' said Olivia; 'you fulfil your own prophecy. You give me what you promise. But when you are sad I must be sad too.'

Mrs. Hazelden stood looking at Olivia for some seconds, with eyes of tender scrutiny, as if debating something with herself. Then her resolution was formed. 'Would you like to come with me to Huntsham?' she said; 'you may

if you will. It is a family gathering. We shall like to have you.'

'But'—said Olivia in hesitating tones——

'You need feel no "buts,"' said Mrs. Hazelden; 'I have an express invitation to you from Eugenia.'

'You have?' cried Olivia, to whom this intelligence seemed—she had not time to think why—to stir a slumbering world of thoughts within her to sudden life. 'I should like it above everything. You are sure that I shall not be in the way?'

'I am sure,' said Mrs. Hazelden; 'you will be welcome, Olivia, most welcome—the last guest the Heriots will ever have in their old home. It is cruel to take you. It will be a dismal scene.'

'Then,' said Olivia, 'I will share it with you. Let me come.'

The scene at Huntsham was, in truth, sufficiently dismal. However much we discount our troubles by anticipation, their actual arrival has a grimness of its own. Sir Adrian had been for years dreaming about the sale of Huntsham, talking about it, preparing the way for it. He had figured it a hundred times in fancy, but he had never known how much it would cost him to realise it in actual fact. He was now dreadfully cast down, too dejected to maintain the outward semblance of cheerfulness or to ignore the disaster which was befalling himself and his household. The Heriots, as a family, were ended. The house which had been their home, the outward and visible sign of all that an old family means, the centre of so many interests, the symbol of so many sentiments, was to pass away—its soul extinct, its traditions outraged, its poetry forgotten—to a strange owner, who would regard it simply as so much mere brick and mortar, the equivalent of so many thousand pounds—whose only questions about it would be whether he had bought it sufficiently cheap, and how it might be best improved. Sir Adrian's soul sank in sorrow and abasement at the thought. The blow had fallen at last. It was in vain to dissimulate; it was a disaster.

Olivia was greatly impressed by all she saw at Hunts-

ham. The heroism of these good, brave people, the framework of whose outer life seemed crumbling all around them —their dignity, their calmness, their submission struck her as noble, pathetic. It had an almost tragic grandeur, a tragic sadness. Sir Adrian, in the midst of his troubles, showed all the fine courtesy of his earlier days. He was awaiting them in the hall as the carriage drove up, as picturesque, as striking a figure as any of the older generations of Heriots who graced the walls around him. He looked, Olivia thought, the ideal of a brave gentleman amid the blows of fate, whose fortunes are at a low ebb, but whose honour is unstained, his fortitude unshaken. Trouble had told upon him. His hair had grown white: some lines of care were written on his brow, his form was somewhat bent, as of one who bowed beneath life's heavy burthen. He looked grave, broken, sad; but he was gentleness itself. Olivia felt the tears rush to her eyes as he held her hand and bade her welcome. 'You have grown very like your mother,' he said, 'and you have your father's eyes! Poor Hillyard, I wish I had him here just now! I am glad at any rate to have his child.' Lady Eugenia was as tender to Olivia as in old times, more tender, perhaps. Her kiss of welcome had a special warmth, as if it meant to convey a message of love. The house was in some disorder, for the arrangements for dismantling it were already in hand, but Olivia's comforts as a guest were well provided for. 'You are to have your old room, Olivia,' Lady Eugenia said, as they went upstairs. 'I thought you would like it. I will come with you. How sweet the garden looks from the window, does it not? The little girls have decked the table with flowers in honour of our dear guest.'

The room seemed just as she remembered it years before. Everything was so familiar, so dear, so sad. Every one was being kind to her. Olivia's heart was full.

Jack, whom they found when they went to dinner, played his part manfully. He behaved to his father with deference, and surrendered without a struggle to arguments which at another time would have stirred the combatant within him. But Jack's heart was too sore to wrangle. Sir Adrian re-

mained master of an undisputed field. Lady Eugenia found herself being delightfully cared for. Jack was always petting her. No one who had watched him would have guessed that he had signed away his heritage, and was in the act of losing it.

The occasion, Olivia felt, was one which justified outspokenness. How, at such a time, amid such friends, lock up one's real feelings, and check the natural, spontaneous flow of sympathy and kindness? All hearts were aching with a common sorrow. Each was feeling for the rest. Each wished to lighten his companion's load. In such an atmosphere it is difficult, it would be incongruous, not to become confidential. Olivia was longing to help, to cheer, to console. Who could stand in need of greater consolation than Jack did, or could better deserve to be consoled? Olivia, with pardonable disregard of all but the necessities of the moment, devoted herself to the congenial task of consolation. Lady Eugenia fanned the flame. Jack was no longer a forbidden topic in her talks with Olivia. She was fervent in her praises of his unselfishness. His mother might well be proud of such a son. She stood on the terrace one morning, her eyes full of tears, watching Jack, his father leaning on his arm, as they strolled beneath the lime trees. 'He is the best of sons,' she said, 'and the best of men. The misfortune is his far more than ours. Our day is nearly done. We have lived our lives here. But for Jack! see how he takes it! I set him against a thousand misfortunes and am thankful.' In such a mood could Olivia show reluctance when, morning after morning, Jack tempted her to come with him and visit many a familiar spot, dear to the recollections of them both. Together they wandered across the park, and through the woods, and down to the little stream which had formed the boundary of their childhood's rambles. It was sad, but yet a pleasant sort of sadness. Here they had played as boy and girl. Here was the elm which Jack, in school-boy pride, had climbed to perilous heights, while Olivia stood below in awe-struck admiration at her companion's prowess. Here was the lane where they had wasted so many delicious

afternoons! Wasted indeed! What afternoons in after life had ever been, could ever be, half as well employed? for were they not fragrant still with a thousand pleasant associations, and tuneful with sweet sounds that it was a joy to remember!

Olivia felt a tender pity take possession of her soul. It clamoured for expression. She would be prude no longer. She would tell the truth; she would say what she was feeling —be the consequences what they might. Jack, charmed with Olivia's melting mood, was busy with a hundred pleasant memories. 'Those were good days, Olivia,' he cried, 'were they not? too good to last or to return. They come but once in a lifetime, people tell us; well, it is something to have had them once. They were the happiest of my life.'

'And of mine,' said Olivia, by this time in no mood to weigh her words; 'I have never been so happy since. I am often sad now—very sad to-day, Jack, because of your troubles. I have wanted to tell you. You bear it nobly.'

'You make them easy to bear,' said Jack; 'you are the best of consolers, the best and the kindest. Despite of everything you have made these last days at Huntsham very happy ones. I shall never forget them.'

Olivia went back to the house a happy woman—happier, more at peace, than she had ever felt. Things around her looked gloomy, but an inward voice was whispering to her to be of good cheer. Happiness for her, for Jack, was close at hand. The night was dark; but already the horizon was beginning to glow with rosy harbingers of coming dawn. The occasion was a sad one, romantically sad: her dear friends were suffering; but Olivia had become conscious of something which forbade her to be sad, which filled her soul with joy, exultation, rapture—something which she had resolutely thrust away from sight and buried deep in the recesses of her heart. Now it would be ignored no more. There was no doubt this time, no misgiving, no room for hesitation. She had found the man she loved!

How smoothly, in such circumstances, does the course of wooing flow! How easy to reveal that which it has cost

so much effort, so much suffering to hide, even, if possible, from oneself! What bootless effort, what unnecessary pain! That evening, as Jack and Olivia wandered about the moss-grown Huntsham paths, and watched the last lights of a sweet June day fading out of the sky, how natural it seemed that, almost before they knew, Jack's long-cherished passion should find utterance, and that Olivia should need but gentle compulsion to own that he was master of her heart. It was the old story of their childhood over again—deeper, stronger, sweeter than before. 'I have had the heart-ache for a dozen years,' cried Jack; 'now, come what mishaps may, I am the happiest of men, the happiest, the most fortunate! How often I have walked about these woods, building castles in the air, or, oftener railing against Fortune because my castle would not build itself the way I wished. I used to love to dream that this dear old place would, one day, be your home. It seemed a sort of consecration of it.'

'I too have had day-dreams and a heart-ache,' said Olivia; 'I have been miserable, sometimes, and hopeless. I am thankful that that part of life is done. I tried to believe that happiness could be found elsewhere than where my heart bade me find it. Now, at last, I am perfectly happy—happy and at peace.'

The sun had set; the west was all aglow with a soft dying glory; one star after another looked out faintly from a darkening sky; the exquisite dewy cool of summer evening was falling on meadow and woodland, refreshing the world after the long day's blaze. A nightingale was pouring out a full flood of song from the neighbouring thicket. All things seemed at peace, best peace of all in two young lovers' hearts, to whom the world has suddenly become a palace of enchantment. 'My true life,' cried Jack, as they turned homewards, 'begins to-night—

> '"The last step has brought me to my love,
> And there I'll rest, as, after much turmoil,
> A blessed soul doth in Elysium"—

See, there is my father. Let us go and tell him.'

It was not, however, destined that the pleasant announcement should be made just then. Sir Adrian met them with a troubled face. 'I have had very bad news from your Uncle Valentine,' he said; 'Antinous is dangerously ill.'

CHAPTER XLVI

THE BEGINNING OF TROUBLES

'Though the mills of God grind slowly,
Yet they grind exceeding small.'

THINGS were going badly with Valentine and his wife. Isabella Heriot was beginning to find that the pleasures of life were fast losing their flavour. Its excitements would stimulate no longer. With the ill-gotten wealth that her mother-in-law's codicil had brought, leanness had entered into her soul, leanness and bitterness—the leanness of satiated desire, the bitterness of disappointed hope. Society had no more to give her in the way of enjoyment. She had climbed as high as she could go, and found no such rapture as that which she had looked up to from below. Rather the air was harsh, the breeze chilly, the mountain-side steep and slippery; it was hard to advance, easy to fall. In a long list of acquaintances, whose acquisition had cost her so many days and nights of toil, Isabella Heriot told herself bitterly that she had not a single friend. Her husband was less to her than ever. He had never forgiven her the estrangement from his brother which her behaviour had occasioned. Valentine in his earlier days had wished for the money, he had wanted it. He now wanted reconciliation with his brother and his family. The estrangement was costing him more than he had bargained for. Sir Adrian's haughty politeness, when, once or twice, they had met for business matters, cut him to the quick. Huntsham was a closed house to him and his wife. His sister Lydia would have nothing to do with either of them. Many of

Valentine's friends, too, espoused Sir Adrian's side, and looked coldly on Isabella's fine dinners and crowded receptions. For himself, Valentine was thoroughly tired of them and of Isabella too. He had known from the first that she was a bad companion for a *tête-à-tête*. There was no love, no pretence of love; and the feelings which had once done duty for love had turned to something near dislike. So Valentine and his wife went their different ways with exterior politeness to each other, but each with a secret resentment, each with ever-lessening esteem, each with hearts which daily grew darker and colder, as new incongruities came to light and indifference ripened into hate. He made no secret of his dulness, and a dull man easily becomes morose. If he frequented parties as assiduously as ever, it was not that they amused him, but because husband and wife had accepted the bitter truth that anything was better than one another's society. Valentine had learnt to think of his home with a shudder, for there—close by the sacred hearth, at the household table, beside the nuptial couch, sat the dread demon of *ennui*, master of the situation.

Another source of disturbance to Mrs. Heriot's domestic peace was the fact, which became daily more apparent, that Malcolm's health was breaking down. Little Antinous was fast approaching the age when he would require a more educated companion. But the idea of Malcolm quitting the household altogether had never been entertained. She was devoted to the child and he to her. It would have been cruelty to separate them; and cruelty to Antinous was to Mrs. Heriot an unimaginable crime. The child, always her idol, became dearer to her as other pleasures lost their charm. He, at least, never disappointed; his mother found in his increasing attractions a balm for all her disappointments. Malcolm managed him better than any one. Nor was this all. Her strength of character, her Puritanic earnestness, her Scotch piety, her strong unswerving loyalty to Mrs. Heriot, her impassioned affection for the child, her long services, extending back to the days when Isabella was a girl—gave her a special position in the

household, made her a privileged person. She did many things for Antinous which his mother was glad to be excused from doing. She taught him her own gloomy creed; she talked to him of the things which fascinate and awe a child's imagination; she bade him, above all things, be sure that his heart was right with God, his conscience free from sin. The child spent his life with her, for Mrs. Heriot's plan of existence left little leisure for the sort of intercourse which children need, nor had she any aptitude for it. No one in the Heriot household could fill Malcolm's place; and now it was obvious that she was failing. Once the calmest, most composed, most imperturbable of mortals, going her way, unmoved by external influences, she was now the victim of moods, or rather, of one despairing mood. A profound melancholy had settled upon her; she was never happy, never cheerful; she went about her business as in a day-dream; her physical powers grew daily less. Her nerves were shattered; she had become an old woman. Mrs. Valentine watched her and made up her mind that she was the victim of some mortal disease. Doctors, however, failed to discover any cause, and could indicate nothing more distinct than want of tone. Malcolm took her tonics submissively, protested that there was nothing the matter with her but old age, and grew pale and haggard, as though the Furies were driving her to her doom.

It was a fine June; the heat was great. London glowed like a spent furnace; Antinous began to flag. He was pale, listless, and evidently required country air. Valentine was tied to the City. Mrs. Heriot had various engagements which she did not choose to miss. Nurse and child accordingly were despatched to Mrs. Heriot's home, where Antinous was always a welcome guest. There he was to await his parents' arrival for a summer visit. Valentine was sharing a moor with some friends, and in the middle of August they would all start for Scotland.

Malcolm was thankful to escape to the country. The heat and airlessness of London was killing her. She longed for cool and quiet. She would get better now, she felt. The dewy, noiseless nights at the Pines, the great vault of

heaven slowly, in majestic silence, wheeling overhead, were the remedy of which she stood in need. Her parents were still alive, privileged pensioners in one of Mr. Goldingham's model cottages. Her sister Maggie had just returned from India and was now at home, a married woman with a little child. Malcolm longed to be with her kinsfolk once again; she wept passionately as she threw herself into her old mother's arms. Maggie was horrified at her sister's looks. The sturdy, self-contained, determined woman was gone. She was but the wreck of her former self.

It was a blazing summer. There was nothing to be done but to sit in the shade under the beech trees in the park. Here Maggie would come with her little son, and the two women would sit chatting while the children played about together, Antinous perfectly happy in having found that supreme desideratum of childhood, a playmate. One day Antinous complained of thirst; the two children asked to be allowed to go to the cottage for a drink of water. It was against rules to go into any of the cottages, but old Malcolm's cottage was proverbial for its spotless purity. He himself, a hale old man of eighty, was a standing proof of the absence of every unhealthy influence. It was but a hundred yards from where they sate. The children begged hard and Malcolm gave them leave to go.

Antinous presently came back refreshed and delighted. Old Malcolm had received him hospitably, had given him a delicious cool drink of water and a piece of Scotch cake. He had prattled to the children of the long-ago days when Master Antinous's mamma was just such another little person as he was now, and used to come and pay him and his old lady a visit and eat cake just as he was doing.

A few days later Malcolm, coming with Antinous to the usual meeting-place under the beeches, found no one there. She went on to her father's cottage to ascertain the cause. She found her sister and mother in great distress. The little child was ill, and getting worse hour by hour. He complained of his throat, and was evidently suffering greatly. The doctor arrived presently and pronounced it a case of diphtheria. Malcolm, when she heard it, gave a groan of horror. She

felt a dire presentiment of evil; she knew that judgment was about to fall. She locked herself in her room, fell on her knees, prayed passionately, wildly, despairingly, that it might fall on her, not on an innocent victim. But what avail the prayers of guilty souls, even to assuage their own apprehensions? What avails the sacrifice when the sacrificer's hand is stained with guilt? Malcolm, even while she prayed, felt a conviction that Heaven was deaf, and that her prayer would not be granted. Two days later she learnt that her sister's child was dead. Presently Antinous began to sicken. Malcolm's heart stood still with horror. She caught the child to her arms in a paroxysm of grief and terror. 'My God,' she cried, 'spare him, spare him! Strike me! Punish me as I deserve, but not the child! Anything but that!'

CHAPTER XLVII

A CONFESSION

Mac. 'Cure her of that.
Canst thou not minister to a mind diseas'd,
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,
Raze out the written troubles of the brain
And with some sweet oblivious antidote
Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of the perilous stuff
Which weighs upon the heart?'

DESPITE Malcolm's prayers—despite assiduous nursing—despite the famous specialist who arrived, next morning, with Mrs. Heriot, Antinous grew steadily worse. Isabella, who had never had a real sorrow before, was beside herself with terror, fury, despair. 'Those,' says George Eliot, 'who have been indulged by fortune, and have always thought of calamity as what happens to others, feel a blind, incredulous rage at the reversal of their lot, and half believe that their wild cries will alter the course of the storm.' Mrs. Heriot's cries were wild and fierce. She turned on Malcolm like a wild animal, the savage mother who sees her offspring torn from her. There was no question as to where and how the malady had been caught. Malcolm had received positive orders to take the child to no cottage. She had chosen to disobey, the child was dying in consequence. 'You are his murderess, his murderess!' Mrs. Heriot cried in her despair.

'Murderess!' cried Malcolm; 'you know well that I would die to save him. I would give my soul for him.'

'You have killed him!' burst out Mrs. Heriot. 'His blood is on your head: you have killed him. It will kill

me. Die for him did you say? You sacrificed him to your own amusement; you broke your word to me. You have killed him.'

Malcolm's ashy lips trembled, but could fashion no reply. Her mistress's words fell like lashes on the shuddering flesh. She sat looking at her in a silent agony.

'Do not look at me like that,' cried Mrs. Heriot; 'you have an evil eye. What are you thinking?'

'I am thinking,' said the other, 'of something I have felt all the morning. I could not be sure that it was not fancy. But it was no fancy. I have not nursed Antinous for nothing. I have diphtheria myself. I am certain of it. I knew all along that I should catch it. Now, perhaps, you will forgive me.'

Isabella Heriot instinctively drew back; but there was no forgiveness, no pity in her tones. 'You shall nurse him no longer; you are his murderess!'

'Murderess!' cried the other, half frantic; 'you little know what I have done for him, for you! Take care what you drive me to!'

'Do not rave like a mad woman,' said her mistress. 'Stay where you are. The doctor will come to you.'

The doctor pronounced Malcolm's illness to be unquestionably diphtheria. It was a serious case; her weak health, her low vitality, her despondent mood, made her a bad subject. She was ill equipped for a life-struggle. Malcolm watched the doctor's grave face. She gave a groan of horror.

'Ah!' she cried, 'I knew it. I shall die! I dare not! I will not! God help me! He is punishing me for my sin, my grievous sin. It has been my torture ever since. Now He has stricken the child, and stricken me! It was for the child's sake that I did it, and it has been in vain. I must repent before I die. May God forgive me!'

'Do not alarm yourself,' said the doctor, taking a mental note of the extreme nervousness of his patient, 'and show a little fortitude. If you wish to recover that is the way to do it. You are in God's hand, remember.'

Malcolm gave a shudder.

'I remember it,' she said, 'only too well. There is no comfort to me in that.'

The next day Antinous was sinking fast. Mrs. Malcolm grew seriously worse. The doctor came from the bedside, where Antinous now lay almost *in extremis*. He found the sick woman in an agony of terror.

'Am I worse?' she demanded with passionate eagerness. 'Can I not recover? I am a strong woman. I never ailed before; my family is a long-lived one. Surely you can save me! For the love of God save me, save me!'

'These cases are always dangerous,' said the doctor; 'but you must really keep calm. Have you anything on your mind?'

'Yes,' said Malcolm; 'a great sin is on my mind. It is crushing me. I am a sinful woman, and dying in my sin. Save me, save me at any cost. I do not mind pain. Is there nothing I can undergo?'

'I will send the clergyman to you, if you please,' said the doctor. 'Perhaps he will calm you. I can do no more for you.'

'I wish to tell you,' said the woman. 'Look, please, in my box; at the bottom you will find a sheet of paper. It is Lady Heriot's last codicil. I signed it, and my sister Maggie signed it. She is here now, and can tell you all. I have concealed it till now. I have been guilty; but my guilt was not to benefit myself.'

The doctor read the paper: 'I revoke the codicil which I was constrained to sign this afternoon. Let my will stand.'

'Those are the words,' said Malcolm; 'she bade me write them. I was nursing her that night. She could not sleep. She kept talking to herself. "I will not do it," she said. "Adrian wants it sorely. Antinous will be rich enough. Isabella forced me." At last she bade me bring paper and write to her dictation, then to call my sister, who was sleeping in the next room. Then we both saw her sign, and signed ourselves. She put it under the pillow. After her seizure the pillow was displaced, the paper slipped to the floor. I picked it up. No one had seen it. I

knew that it meant ruin to Antinous. It has been in my box ever since. Maggie is here, and will tell you. May God forgive me!'

'I must tell Mr. Heriot, of course,' said the doctor.

'He must be told,' said the dying woman with a groan.

'Shall I give him the paper?'

'Never!' cried Malcolm; 'give it to no one but Sir Adrian.'

Maggie put her sister's story beyond dispute. She remembered the occurrence, recognised the paper and the signatures. She had not been aware of its importance, and had never thought of it till now; but her recollection was distinct. That evening little Antinous died.

CHAPTER XLVIII

EVENING LIGHTS

'Deus nobis hæc otia fecit.'

NOTHING in all the changes which Malcolm's disclosures had brought about in his position and prospects gave Sir Adrian more heartfelt satisfaction than the way in which his brother Valentine behaved. The two brothers had always at heart been longing for reconciliation. Each really loved the other. Both had grieved under the estrangement. Valentine had smarted under the stern sentence which banished him from the home, which, as years went on and the world's ambitions lost something of their attractiveness, was, he found, dearer to him than most things in life. In ordinary circumstances Sir Adrian might have found it hard to forgive, Valentine to accept forgiveness; but now a tragic sorrow bent both hearts in submission and linked them in sympathy.

Sir Adrian, standing over little Antinous's coffin, and watching his brother's haggard look of grief, could only seize his hand and seal an unspoken treaty of forgiveness. All was forgotten but the calamity which had shipwrecked the happiness, the hopes of one of them, and had turned the schemes, the labours, the ambitions of life to a hollow mockery, a ghastly comment on the vanity of human wishes. In that little coffin lay the object of all Valentine's busy life, his eager contrivance, his restless energy. For him he had toiled, for him he had plotted, for him he had sacrificed things once dear to him, which only so transcendent a

sacrifice could claim. He had silenced conscience; he had tampered with honour; he had forfeited his friends' esteem, his brother's love. Now all was over. Nothing remained to wish, to hope, to labour for. Valentine spoke to Sir Adrian with perfect frankness about the money. 'It would all have been Jack's one day,' he said, 'for, of course, as matters stand, I should have left all to him; to whom should I leave it? but I am glad that this part of it is yours at once, Adrian. I give you my honour I am glad to be rid of it: it weighed on my soul. I have never been happy since I got it. It has been a curse to me. It has brought me a curse. Now that it is gone I may hope to be forgiven. You forgive me at any rate?'

'And you must forgive me,' said Sir Adrian, in the kind frank tones which Valentine remembered as closing many a boyish quarrel; 'I need forgiveness, God knows. I have been wrong, very wrong. I know it. I confess it humbly. I have nursed my rage and thought about you like a brute. Forgive me, Valentine. Pray God forgive us both. I am thankful to be friends again. Dear brother, to my heart's core I sorrow for your loss.'

. . . . . .

One other scene, a farewell scene, before the cares, joys and sorrows of the Heriots fade from us into the gloom. A year has passed, and it is summer again, and Jack and Olivia—by this time wearing the dignities of an experienced married pair—have left their quarters in the Museum for a holiday at Jack's old home. Dr. Crucible has arrived for a Sunday in the country. The sacred rites of five-o'clock tea are in course of celebration under the great cedar on the lawn.

A year of prosperity had done wonders for Sir Adrian and his wife. Sir Adrian stood upright again, as a man should who has paid off his mortgages, owes no one a shilling, and is rich enough not to care if a farm or two more or less remains unlet. Lady Eugenia, relieved from her husband's anxieties and Jack's love troubles, and rejoicing in a daughter-in-law whom she found every day more congenial to her taste, had blossomed into a serenity and

good-nature which proved how heavily her former cares had weighed upon her spirits. Olivia makes a perfect daughter of the house. She has now gone to summon Dr. Crucible from the library, where he has been suspiciously quiet for the last hour and a half. The two are coming, arm in arm, across the lawn to join the rest. 'A siesta?' said Sir Adrian; 'we were obliged to disturb you; Olivia wants to give you a cup of tea.'

'Base insinuation,' cried the doctor, showing a volume which he was holding in his hand, 'I have been too well employed. There is excellent good reading in the library. I lighted on a volume of Emerson. What do you think of this piece of philosophy?'

And then the doctor read—

'"Meanwhile life wears on and ministers to you, no doubt, as to me, its undying and grand lessons, its uncontainable, endless poetry, its short dry prose of scepticism, its veins of cold air in the evening woods, quickly swallowed by the wide warmth of June, its steady correction of the rashness and short sight of youthful judgment, and its pure repairs of all the rents and seeming ruin it operates in what it gave: although we love the first gift so well that we cling to the ruin and think we will be cold to the new if the new shall come. But the new steals on us, like a star, which rises behind our back as we walk, and we are borrowing gladly its light before we know the benefactor. So be it with you, with me, with all."'

'I join in that prayer,' said Sir Adrian; 'My good star rose late, but it lends a kindly light, and is leading me by pleasant paths. May it shine upon us all.'

THE END

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